

LONGER STORIES THAN CONTAINED IN
ANY FIVE CENT LIBRARY PUBLISHED

FIVE CENTS

BRAVE AND BOLD

A DIFFERENT COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK

No 24

THE BICYCLE BOYS
OF BLUEVILLE
or Joe Masterson's
Unknown Enemies



BY
THE AUTHOR
OF
"THE YANKEE PRINCE"

The bicycle boys of Blueville received cheer after cheer as they rode away.

BRAVE & BOLD

A Different Complete Story Every Week

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1903, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C. STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 24.

NEW YORK, June 6, 1903.

Price Five Cents.

THE BICYCLE BOYS OF BLUEVILLE;

OR,

Joe Masterson's Unknown Enemies.

By CORNELIUS SHEA.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES SOME CHARACTERS AND A NEW WHEEL.

Blueville, on the New Jersey coast, was as fine a little summer resort as one could find in a day's travel.

In the winter its population amounted to less than five hundred souls, but in the summer it was different. Then the city people came out.

The principal industry of the inhabitants of Blueville was fishing, and during the season the men and boys who risked their lives on the water made considerable money.

One of the fisher boys bore the name of Joe Masterson. He was a handsome, healthy-looking young fellow of eighteen, strong as an ox and agile as a panther.

Joe had been washed upon the beach from a wreck when a child of two years, and he had lived ever since at the home of old Jim Edwards, the fisherman.

No one knew how it was, but old Edwards gave it out the day after the child came ashore that his name was Joe Masterson.

When questioned how he learned this he merely shook his head. "There is some secret about that boy," the wiser ones said.

Joe was treated fairly well by the Edwards family, and at their request he called the fisherman and his wife uncle and aunt.

They had a son—William by name—but generally called Bill—who was about Joe's age.

As might be supposed, the two never got along very well together, and Bill, who was a coward, had received more than one thrashing at the hands of Joe.

Every time this happened the boy would be forced to lead a hard life of it for a day or two after.

But he was smart and industrious, and the elder Edwards thought it probable that he would leave them if he was not treated right.

He brought considerable money to the house, and they could not afford to lose this.

At the time of the opening of our story—June 1, 1896—Bill Edwards had learned to hate Joe Masterson with all his might.

The last straw that broke the camel's back was the fact of Joe purchasing a bicycle.

He had saved enough money to do this, and Bill had not.

There was the whole thing in a nutshell.

For over a year our hero had longed for a wheel of his own. He was an expert with one, and his friends were only too willing to lend him one, but that hardly satisfied him—he wanted one of his own, and he stuck at it till he got it.

And it was a beauty, too—one of the best of American makes—strong, handsome and light.

As Joe was uncrating the machine after the express wagon left

it at the door of the little cottage, Bill Edwards came out, followed by his father and mother.

It was near sunset, and the work for the day was long since over.

"I think you'll make out with your boat and nets better'n you will with that thing," observed Mrs. Edwards.

"Only think of it, mother! He paid fifty dollars for it!" spoke up Bill.

"Fifty dollars!" echoed the woman. "Why, Joe, where did you get as much money as that?"

"I sayerd it," returned the boy, with a proud smile.

"Humph!" exclaimed the old man. "You might better have let me have it to put a new roof on the house an' fix it up. Needs it bad enough, I'm sure."

"So it does," said his wife, sharply; "so it does, Jim. But let me tell you that if you had saved your money, instead of spending it for rum down at the tavern, you'd have enough money to build a fine new house, let alone fixin' this old one up."

This was a settler for the old fisherman, and without a word he walked away.

Meanwhile our hero was working away at his bicycle, putting the saddle and handle-bar on, and otherwise getting it ready.

"I don't like that name-plate," Bill ventured, after a pause; "it's too flashy."

Joe said nothing.

"I suppose you'll let your cousin try it, won't you, Joe?" asked Mrs. Edwards.

"No," promptly retorted the boy; "he doesn't like the wheel, so he can't ride it. Let him buy one to suit him."

This might appear rather selfish on our hero's part, but the treatment he had received at the hands of his so-called cousin amply justified him in speaking that way.

"I wouldn't ride the old tin-cart, anyway!" sneered Bill. "You needn't think you are the only fish in the net just because you rode Champion Miller's wheel once and made a record that astonished the natives. His wheel is worth a dozen of such things as you have there!"

"Maybe it is, and maybe it ain't," retorted Joe, half to himself, as he put the finishing touch on his machine and put his wrench away.

"Go on and join the bicycle club that is to be organized to-night. You needn't think I don't know all about it," went on Bill.

"Goin' to join a club, eh?" exclaimed Mrs. Edwards. "What in the world are you going to do that for, Joe?"

"To get some pleasure and enjoyment," was the reply. "There is something else to do in this world besides work."

"That might be," and the woman shook her head as though she doubted it. "That might be, but I can't remember of doin' anything else but work—ever since I married Jim Edwards, anyhow," and turning, she entered the house.

Joe jumped on his wheel and rode off over the smooth road toward the main street of the village:

There was a store where bicycle sundries were sold, and as he

needed a lamp and a bell, he thought he had better buy them right away.

It was getting dark by the time Joe rode up to this place and dismounted, but not too dark for a number of young fellows hanging about there to notice that he had a new wheel.

"Hello, Joe! she's come at last, hey?" cried a big, strapping boy whose name was Jake Leeds.

"Yes," replied our young friend. "It came on the last express in for the day. I am mighty glad, I can tell you!"

"My! ain't it a beauty!"

"She's a dandy!"

"It's a racer, ain't it?"

"I wish I had one like it!"

These and other similar exclamations came from the lips of the crowd of boys who surrounded Jos Masterson's new bicycle.

Nearly all of them were his warm friends, and they were boys who lived in Blueville and nearly all of them worked at fishing.

Some three or four of them had new wheels, others had old ones, and two of them had been waiting to see Joe's new one before they purchased their mounts for the season.

One was the grocer's son, Frank Caldwell, and the other was Tom Simmons, a young fisherman.

Frank and Tom were Joe's selected chums, and like him they had saved their money.

When the mail left Blueville the following morning it carried an order to the firm in New York to send down two bicycles like Joe Masterson's as soon as possible.

CHAPTER II.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BLUEVILLE CLUB.

It was just three nights following the arrival of Joe Masterson's bicycle that about fifteen boys met in a room over the grocery store, which some of the old residents called a hall.

The room had once been the only public place where an inside meeting could be held in Blueville; but since the erection of a town hall the rent the owner got from it had been little indeed.

But it suited the boys very well for the purpose they intended to use it for, as it was well supplied with benches, chairs, tables and kerosene lamps.

Joe was one of the last to reach the meeting room, and when he got there he saw that they had a stranger among them.

He was introduced to our hero as Don Everett.

Shaking him heartily by the hand he observed in a rather familiar way:

"Hello, old fellow! So you are the coming champion, are you? Well, you want to look out for me; I can put up a good clip, you know. The folks came here to stay all summer, and I expect to enjoy myself. I never knew country boys were such jolly fellows!"

As the young fellow, who was probably nineteen years of age, made this speech he slapped Joe on the back in a friendly way and turned to talk to some one else.

"What do you think of Don Everett?" Frank Caldwell whispered to Joe a minute or two later.

"I think he is rather familiar," was the reply.

"So do I. He is altogether too fresh for such short acquaintance."

"Who brought him here?"

"I did, I suppose. He was down at the post office when I went after the mail. He read the notice we had posted there about the meeting to-night, and he promptly walked over to me and asked me if I knew anything about it. I told him I did, and he announced his intention of being present, and here he is."

"I can't see that you brought him here, then."

"Well, no; not exactly."

"Well, let him join the club if he wants to. He may make a first-class member. He is from the city, and we are not used to his ways yet."

Further conversation between the two boys was prevented by the sound of the gavel calling the meeting to order.

As they looked up they saw that Don Everett was acting as temporary chairman.

He had made friends with the majority of the boys in short order, and some of them had advised him to pick up the gavel.

"Gentlemen," said he, in an easy, business-like way, "the first thing in order is to elect our officers. They will consist of a president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and captain. Who will you have for president?"

"Don Everett!" cried one of the boys.

Joe was just about to remark that things were being pushed too fast, when Tom Simmons called out his name in nomination.

"Second it," yelled half a dozen.

"Are there any further nominations?" questioned Everett, coolly taking a survey of those present.

"Move the nominations be closed!" sang out a voice.

"All right. Prepare your ballots, gentlemen."

Don Everett stepped down and walked over to our hero with a smile.

"That is the way we hurry things through in New York," he said. "There is no use in being so slow; I shall be able to teach you country boys lots, whether it is you or I who is elected president. No hard feelings on my part which ever way it goes."

Before Joe could make a reply he stepped off and began talking to some others.

It was quite evident that some of the boys had decided that the city chap would make a first-class president, for they began writing his name on slips of paper and passing them around.

Meanwhile Joe's friends were not idle.

Frank Caldwell, who was the best and most rapid writer in Blueville, was writing slips and passing them to Tom Simmons.

Simmons passed them around, making a remark here and there as he deemed it advisable.

Ten minutes from the time the nominations were made each of the fifteen boys had two slips in his possession—one contain-

ing the name of Joe Masterson, and the other that of Don Everett.

An empty cigar box was placed on a table, and then the rather forward city chap called out:

"The polls are now open! Step forward and do your voting. This bicycle club, to be a success, must have a hustler at the head. Use your own judgment, now!"

In single file the boys walked past the box, depositing their ballots as they did so.

Fourteen ballots had been cast in the box, and then Don Everett threw his in.

Then, for the first time, he suggested something that was strictly fair.

And that was that Frank Caldwell and one of the boys who had been writing slips for him count the vote and announce the result.

This left it so that no cheating could be done.

The two boys promptly took charge of the cigar box.

Everett produced a pencil and card to tally the names as they were called out, and our hero followed his example.

With breathless interest the boys awaited the result.

At length it came!

"Masterson eight, Everett seven!" called out Frank Caldwell.

A cheer went up from those who had stuck to Joe.

Don Everett promptly jumped forward and seized our hero by the hand.

"I congratulate you!" he said.

Joe knew that he did not mean this, but he thanked him just the same.

Frank Caldwell and Tom Simmons pushed the successful candidate to the platform.

Clearing his throat, Joe began:

"Gentlemen, I thank you for the honor you have conferred upon me. Now then, we will finish the business of our meeting. Who will you have for tellers?"

The two who had just acted were selected and duly appointed.

Then the following officers were elected without any opposition:

Melvin Bates, vice-president; Frank Caldwell, secretary; Don Everett, treasurer; Tom Simmons, captain.

Three rousing cheers were given for the officers, and then when quiet was restored Joe again arose.

"The next thing in order," he said, "is a suitable name for our club."

"How about the B. B. of B.?" suggested the vice-president.

"What do those letters stand for?" questioned Everett.

"The Bicycle Boys of Blueville!"

"Good—good!" shouted the boys in chorus.

"That is not the regular style of naming clubs," the treasurer ventured.

"Take a vote on it!" cried somebody.

The vote was taken and it was carried without a dissenting voice.

Don Everett did not like the name, because he had not suggested it, but he wisely said nothing.

The rest of the business of the meeting was soon gone through with—amount of dues, night of meeting, etc., until only one thing remained to be settled.

That was the color and style of the club uniform.

Just as a neat fitting suit of dark blue had been adopted the door of the meeting room flew wide open with a bang, and the form of a boy rolled in upon the floor.

It was Bill Edwards! He had been listening, and the door not being properly fastened, had opened unexpectedly!

CHAPTER III.

BILL EDWARDS.

Bill Edwards possessed a heart that was bad.

When Joe rode off on his new bicycle the night he uncanted it Bill Edwards was very mad at him.

He hated him more than he had ever done before, and he longed to find a way to do the boy an injury.

But Joe was industrious and made the greater part of the living of the Edwards household, and Bill knew this only too well.

If Joe were not a member of the household Bill would not fare so well.

Consequently he dare not go too far.

But Bill was inquisitive.

He desired to find out all he could about the bicycle club Joe was going to join.

So on the appointed night, after all the boys had ascended the stairs to the meeting room above the grocery, he crept softly up after them.

And he got down on the floor with his ear to the keyhole and heard everything that took place.

He was on the alert for the first sound of a step approaching the door, but he never gave a thought about the door being properly fastened.

Consequently he leaned a little too heavily against it and tumbled into the room, just as the meeting was about over.

If ever a person was scared nearly out of his wits Bill Edwards was.

As he struck the floor he gave a yell that could have been heard a block away.

A couple of boys rushed to the spot and seized him.

They had not recognized him and thought he was a burglar.

Joe was the first to see who it was.

"It is my cousin—Bill Edwards!" he cried.

"Yes—yes, it's me!" yelled Edwards. "Let me go, please. I couldn't help falling against the door."

Some of the boys laughed and some of them got mad, but all felt that Bill had been playing the part of an eavesdropper.

The result was that he was unceremoniously hauled out into the hallway and tumbled downstairs.

Glad to get out of the building, but mad in his own peculiar way, Bill sneaked off to the shadow of a row of willow trees.

"I'll get square on 'em for that!" he hissed. "I'll get square, even if I have to kill Joe Masterson for it. I'll——"

A hand touched him on the shoulder.

Bill sank cowering to his knees.

"Wha—wha—what!" he stammered.

"I heard what you said, my friend, and I want you to know that I am with you!" said a voice in a hoarse whisper.

It was Don Everett. The instant he learned that the eavesdropper was the cousin of Joe Masterson he felt that he must make the fellow's acquaintance.

So making a hasty excuse, he left the meeting room immediately after the coward was kicked down stairs.

He saw him sneak off in the direction of the willows, and like a cat, followed him.

When he heard Bill muttering vengeance against Joe Masterson he felt delighted beyond measure.

"Don't—don't have me arrested!" the wretch pleaded, as Don Everett bent over him.

"I won't have you arrested," he replied. "Take me to some place where we can talk strictly in private. Hurry up, now!"

Like magic the coward sprang to his feet.

"Come on!" he exclaimed in a whisper. "I'll do anything you say. You are a gentleman."

Down a winding path he led the way, and presently a lonesome spot on the sandy beach was reached.

Bill took a seat on the remains of an old boat and nodded for his companion to do the same.

"We can talk here with nothing to hear us but the waves," he said.

"All right," was the reply. "Now to business. How much money do you want to kill Joe Masterson?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE MILE CHAMPIONSHIP.

"Boys, here is a chance for Joe to distinguish himself and win the championship of the county!"

It was Frank Caldwell who spoke.

"What is it?" asked a number of boys who belonged to the club, and were hanging about the stoop of the grocery store.

"An invitation and entry blanks for the meet of the Juniper Wheelmen at Juniper!"

"When is it?"

"A week from Saturday."

"Joe ought to be in good condition by that time," said Tom Simmons. "I saw him do a mile in 2.17 flat yesterday, and he didn't appear to be trying very hard, either."

"Joe's a good rider, and that new wheel of his is a dandy!" cried an enthusiastic listener.

"So are Frank's and Tom's wheels dandies!" spoke up another. "They are the same make."

"Well," observed the grocer's son, "I am perfectly satisfied with mine. I—— Here comes Joe now, fellows!"

Sure enough, our hero was just turning the corner of the road that led from the beach.

It was nearly a week now since the organization of the club, and beyond two or three short runs they had not done much.

When the secretary announced the receipt of the communication from the Juniper Wheelmen the boys were delighted.

As soon as Joe Masterson read it he promptly filled out one of the entry blanks.

"I'll go in the one-mile and five-mile races and do my best," he said.

"Don Everett is going to enter the same races," the secretary answered.

"He is perfectly welcome, as far as I am concerned," retorted our hero. "Between the two of us, we ought to win one of the races, at least."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Jake Leeds, the big, powerful fellow. "You both can ride like a streak."

Joe did not have much time to train, as the fishing season was now in its height, and it was only at night that he went out for a practice spin.

One night, as he was riding along the smooth, level road at the outskirts of the village, he was startled by the shrill scream of a female.

It came from a house ahead of him on the left side of the road.

The boy was riding at a terrific pace, because at that hour of the night there were few people on the road.

He slowed up as quickly as he could just as the cry of:

"Help! Murder!" rang out.

Hastily leaning his wheel against the fence, he sprang over and hurried for the house.

There was a female in distress—probably being murdered, and that was enough for Joe.

The house was an old one, and had not been occupied for a year, and our young friend was puzzled at hearing the sounds come from it.

As he burst through the dense growth of shrubbery that surrounded it all was as still as the grave.

Not a light showed from a window, and there was not the least sign of any one being there.

The young bicycle rider shrugged his shoulders.

"I was riding so fast that I had no idea I was near the haunted mansion," he muttered. "I don't believe in ghosts; as most of the people in Blueville do. The screams I heard came from a live person, and a female, at that! But I shan't investigate any further at present. I am satisfied that some trick is being played; I might have known it when I dismounted!"

Turning into the shrubbery he made his way back to the roadside.

His wheel was standing where he left it, so mounting, he rode off.

Joe said nothing to any one of what he had experienced, as he knew it would but increase the fear that the superstitious ones had of the house.

But he determined to pay a visit to the old building some time and solve the mystery of the strange noises he had heard.

As he had other things to think of now he let the matter drop.

His work and the meet of the Juniper Wheelmen were enough to occupy his mind.

At length the day of the meet came.

Juniper was not over eight miles distant, and shortly after the noon hour the Bicycle Boys of Blueville started in a body for the meet.

Their uniforms were neat and tasty, and as they rode away they received cheer after cheer from the crowd who had come to see them off.

Many of the people who did not have wheels were going to drive over to Juniper, or else go by train.

Among the latter was Bill Edwards.

He told his mother he was going over to see Joe get defeated, and he gloated over the thought of such a thing.

Mrs. Edwards shook her head.

"Taint everybody as can beat Joe," she said. "He sticks right to business at anything he goes at."

"We'll see," he remarked, as he left to catch the train.

Juniper was quite a small village, but it owned a bicycle track and fair grounds, and that is what made it a popular resort during the summer and fall.

The track was not a first-class one, by any means, but it was just an ordinary dirt track of three laps to the mile.

Both Joe and Everett were entered in the one-mile championship of the county, and the five-mile open.

The one-mile came third on the list, and when the announcement was made for the start nine racers were on the scratch.

Joe's number was four, and Don Everett had the figure six.

No. 1 was the Juniper club's favorite, and he was picked for the winner by the majority of the crowd.

The pistol shot cracked and the county mile championship was on.

No. 9 set the pace, and No. 1 neatly dropped in behind him.

Everett took third place, and our hero remained near the tail end.

It was a sort of loafing race at the start, but when one lap had been made No. 3 put on some steam, and passed the pacemaker like a shot.

Joe must have anticipated what he was going to do, for he dropped in second as neatly as you please.

Then the excitement began in earnest.

The nine riders were all on their mettle now. Each one of them wanted the honor of being champion of the county, and they bent low to their work.

At the end of the second lap one man had dropped out and four others were so far in the rear that they could not hope to get a place.

The leaders were No. 3 and No. 1, Don Everett and our hero.

Pretty soon No. 3 gave out, and then the final spurt came.

A shout went up from the throng of spectators.

No. 1 seemed to be walking away from the rest with the greatest of ease.

But no! When but thirty feet from the tape Joe Masterson put all his power on the pedals and shot ahead, a winner by a full length.

CHAPTER V.

A WINNER AGAIN.

The cheer that went up when Joe Masterson crossed the tape a winner was loud and prolonged.

"He is following close upon the track of Eddie Bald!" cried an enthusiastic spectator. "I never saw such a beautiful finish since Bald was champion, years ago."

The majority of the members of the Blueville Club nearly went wild with delight.

A few of them favored Don Everett, and they were very much disappointed at seeing him lose the race.

And Everett himself! He could hardly contain himself; he was so enraged and disappointed that he could have murdered our hero on the spot.

But he managed to restrain himself, and received the words of sympathy from his friends without showing his real feelings.

But he hated Joe worse than ever now.

Bill Edwards, who had come down to see his cousin get "wiped out," could scarcely believe his senses.

He did not know whether to feel proud over the result of the race or more bitter toward Joe.

Narrow-minded villain as he was, he chose the latter.

"Joe is too fresh, anyway, and now he will be worse than ever," he muttered. "I wonder if Don Everett hates him any more than I do?"

Bill got down from his seat and mingled with the boys from Blueville.

Pretty soon he saw Everett enter the dressing room, which was built under the grand stand.

He hastened after him.

"You can't get in here," said the man on guard.

"I want to see the young fellow who just went in," Bill insisted.

Hearing his voice, Everett turned and saw him.

"That's all right; let him in," he said to the man.

Young Edwards passed in.

A boy named Nagle, who was from Blueville, started in at rubbing Don's limbs, and Bill Edwards helped him.

Nagle was a crafty young fellow, who had resided in Blueville for about a year with a widowed mother.

He had never been known to do a day's work, yet he always had plenty of money.

No one had any particular liking for him, nor did they have anything against him, so it was easy enough for him to become one of the charter members of the club.

Don had selected him to attend to him at the meet of the Juniper Wheelmen, and Nagle was doing it faithfully.

"Too bad that you didn't win, Don," observed Bill Edwards, as he rubbed away.

"It can't be helped now," was the retort. "If I had been in a little better condition I would have come in ahead."

"Sure you would!" spoke up Nagle.

"I think I sprained one of the tendons of my right leg, too."

"Then you shouldn't go in the other race," said Bill.

"No!" echoed Nagle.

"I—I don't think I will," replied Everett, hesitatingly.

He had not injured himself a particle, but he knew he could not hope to beat Joe in the next race, and an excuse was in order.

The intervening events were run off, and presently it came time for the entries in the five-mile race to appear.

Don Everett, in his regular road costume, came out and took a seat in the grand stand.

A murmur of surprise went up from those who recognized him.

Not a few of them thought he would stand a good chance to win the race.

"Injured my right leg in the other race," lied Everett to a gentleman who leaned over and asked him why he was not going to race.

This soon got noised all over the grand stand, and, whether they believed it or not, the crowd paid no further attention to Don.

Joe Masterson had won the county championship, and when he lined up into position for the five-mile race a cheer went up.

There were thirteen in this race—an unlucky number so it proved, as there was a bad spill on the third lap, and six of the contestants became so badly tangled up that they gave it up.

Joe escaped being in it by a narrow margin, as did No. 1, of the Junipers, his most dangerous rival.

Round and round the track the wheels spun, each of the seven remaining contestants taking a turn at pace making.

On the last lap Joe was fourth man, and as they neared the finish he made one of his magnificent spurts and won with hands down.

The hardy young fisherboy outclassed them all.

It was quite a fast race, for the time was 11.57 2-5.

Again Joe received an ovation.

He was the hero of the hour.

The members of the Juniper Club were ready to admit the fact, and when the prizes were given to the winner they went with the good will of the Juniper boys.

But Don Everett and Bill Edwards were more bitter than ever against the Blueville champion.

Nagle, too, sided with them, for, somehow, he did not want to see Joe win.

Nagle had a very mean disposition.

He resolved to cut one of the hero's tires so he could not ride the wheel home.

He said nothing of his intentions to either Everett or Bill, but when the meet broke up he was ready to do the dastardly trick.

Joe's wheel was standing against the fence while he was talking to Tom Simmons, the captain of the club.

Nagle slyly opened his knife and walked over to it.

Our hero saw him, but showed no signs that he did.

When he saw the open knife in the boy's hand he bounded forward like a shot.

Just as Nagle was about to ruin the tire Joe's fist caught him behind the ear and felled him to the ground.

In a moment there was an excited crowd about the two.

"A fight! A fight!" went up the cry.

"No—no!" shouted our hero to make himself heard. "It is no fight; I caught this fellow in the act of cutting my tire, that's all."

"You lie!" yelled Nagle, springing to his feet, the open knife still clutched in his hand.

He approached Joe as though to stab him—and spat! Down he went again.

The champion rider of the county showed that he could strike a very hard blow, for Nagle lapsed into insensibility.

"You struck a man smaller than yourself!" cried Don Everett, springing forward.

Joe's eyes flashed dangerously.

"Keep away from me, or I'll strike you!" he retorted.

"You will, eh? I'll——"

At this juncture both were seized by their friends and pulled away in different directions.

"Mount your wheels and start for home," sang out the captain.

"We'll settle this business at a special meeting to-night."

Nagle got up and slunk from the grounds with his bicycle, the hisses of the crowd following.

Two minutes later the Bicycle Boys of Blueville started for the run home, both Joe and Don Everett in their ranks.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHT AND WHAT FOLLOWED IT.

The members of the Blueville Club conversed in whispers as they rode out of Juniper.

There was not one among them but that thought there would be a fight between Joe Masterson and Don Everett before they got home.

Nagle must have gone on pretty fast, for he had not been overtaken.

The boys put up a pretty good gait, and a lonely spot about halfway between Blueville and Juniper was soon reached.

The sun was just setting and everything was calm and peaceful apparently.

Suddenly the voice of Don Everett rang out:

"Joe Masterson, here is a good place to settle the little difference between us."

Without a word Joe dismounted.

"Come on," cried Tom Simmons, who was averse to seeing a fight.

"We have the right to stop if we wish," said Everett as he sprang from his wheel.

"I know that," was the captain's reply. "Well, all hands can stop, then."

Every boy dismounted.

Joe leaned his bicycle against a tree and waited to see what the city boy was going to do.

Don was no coward, and calmly pulling off his coat, he exclaimed:

"Joe, you told me if I did not keep away from you you would strike me. Is that so?"

"Yes," replied Joe; "I meant just what I said. I want to tell you that if you upheld Nagle in what he was going to do you are no better than he is. If you insist on fighting me, why, come on!"

A low murmur of admiration went up from the boys. They all knew that Joe was fully capable of taking care of himself against any boy in Blueville, but they allowed that, as Everett was from the city, he might be a wonder in the way of boxing.

Anyway, he was taller and had a longer reach than our hero.

"Boys, if you must fight, let it be a square, stand-off one," said Tom Simmons.

"We will," nodded the two principals as they faced each other.

Don Everett showed himself the aggressor. He led with a most vicious blow at our young champion's neck and missed.

Joe countered and struck him a glancing blow on the cheek.

Seeing it was going to be a thoroughly scientific bout, the club members applauded.

Everett made another attempt and failed.

And he received a stinging clip on the nose for his pains which drew the blood and made him see stars.

He became enraged when he saw he was bleeding.

Like a savage bull he rushed upon Joe and succeeded in clinching him.

Then he strove to throw him.

"This is no wrestling match!" called out big Jake Leeds. "Break away, there, Everett!"

But the city boy paid no attention to this. He was fighting foul now, even using his teeth and feet.

Jake Leeds was just about to pull the combatants apart when a startling thing happened.

Don Everett went shooting over Joe's shoulder and landed head first upon the ground.

Just how the trick was done no one could tell, as it was accomplished almost before they realized it.

Everett sprang to his feet, his face as black as a thunder cloud.

"I'll kill you for that!" he hissed.

It was then that Joe Masterson went at him in grand style.

He knocked the maddened boy down with the greatest of ease, and when he got up he did the thing again.

This was repeated three times, and then Don Everett lay still in the middle of the road.

The last blow had rendered him unconscious.

"I am sorry," said Joe, with a shake of the head, "but I had to do it. Just why that fellow hates me so I do not know, but I am satisfied that he would not hesitate to kill me if he got the opportunity."

A couple of sympathizers carried the unconscious villain to a grassy spot beneath a tree, where he soon came to.

As soon as he saw he was all right Joe mounted his wheel.

"I'm off," said he. "I must be home in time to go out and lift a net."

"I'll go with you, Joe," spoke up Jake Leeds. "The rest can follow as they see fit."

"All right," responded the captain.

The two were soon riding swiftly down the road.

"You polished him off in great style," observed Jake. "Joe, you could make money giving boxing lessons this winter."

Our hero laughed.

"I hardly think that, Jake," he retorted.

"But you could, though. If I wasn't so big and clumsy I'd like to take some lessons myself."

"Fancy me giving you fighting lessons, Jake. Why, you could pick me up and throw me over your head without any trouble."

"I suppose I could—if I could get hold of you. There's where the point comes in."

"Change the subject, Jake; I've got a secret to tell you."

"A secret?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I made a discovery the other day."

"A discovery?"

"Yes, if you'll promise never to mention it."

"I won't, I assure you."

"Well, then, the mouth of Crook Creek holds a small fortune for us."

"Wha—what do you mean?" stammered the big boy.

"I mean that the bottom is covered with small natural growth oysters."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. Do you want to go in partnership with me?"

"Do I? Certainly I do."

"We will plant the seed over in Bunn's Cove on a ground that I have hired for three years."

"An oyster ground that you have hired!" exclaimed Jake.

"Well, that just beats me!"

"There is not enough money in this net-fishing business, so I am going to try something else along with it. You go with me to-night and I'll show you the seed oysters. I am not going to lift a net—I merely said that for an excuse to leave."

"I'll go with you. We can take my father's sailboat."

"That is just what we want. I have been going to speak to you about this before. If your father will let us have the use of the *Emma* for a month we will be able to lay the foundation of a fortune."

"Pshaw! He'll let us have it quick enough. Since he got the job of town constable he has hardly bothered himself about the boat."

"Well, we'll take her out to-night, then."

The two boys had been so engrossed in their conversation that

they had failed to notice a bicycle that was following close behind them.

It was Nagle who was riding it, and he had heard nearly all their conversation.

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER PLOT.

Nagle slowed up as Joe and Jake went around a curve and came to a halt without them seeing him.

He sat down on a fence rail and waited for the rest of the club members to come along.

Pretty soon they came in sight.

Mounting his wheel, he joined them, and all hands rode on, with little to say.

When the grocery store was reached the boys branched off for their respective homes.

Nagle followed Everett until they were alone on the village street.

Then he rode alongside him and told him he had important news for him.

"What is it?" asked Everett, turning his bruised and battered face toward his friend.

"You showed your friendship to me by interfering," he said.

"Yes," was the petulant retort; "is that all?"

"No, not by a great deal."

"Well, what is it, then?"

"You want revenge?"

"Yes; go on."

"So do I want revenge, and I know a good way to have it."

"See here," exclaimed Everett as he looked at Nagle keenly, "will you come over to the house with me?"

"Yes."

"Very well. You can dine with me, and while we are at the table you can tell me anything you like. Understand, no matter what you tell me, it will never be breathed by me, even if I should not approve of it."

"I am the same way, so we need not be afraid of each other."

A minute or two later the pair rode up to the house occupied by the Everett family.

It was one of the finest cottages in the village, and a rather heavy rent was paid for it.

But the Everetts were wealthy and could well stand it.

Don led the way direct to the bathroom, where the pair doctored their swollen faces as best they could. Then they repaired to the library.

The city boy excused himself and left the room.

In the dining-room his father, stepmother and step-sister were seated at dinner.

"Why, what is the matter, Don?" cried the girl, whose name was Agnes.

"Nothing. An accident with my wheel, that's all," he replied carelessly. Then, turning to his step-mother, he added:

"I have a friend in the library who will dine with me, and, as you are about through, we will wait."

"Very well, Don; I'll tell the cook."

As the boy passed his father he nodded for him to come out.

The old man did so a moment later.

"Well?" he interrogated.

"The infernal hound not only beat me in the race to-day, but thrashed me as well," said Don, in a low tone that was full of bitterness.

The brow of his father darkened.

"If he is not put out of the way shortly he will ruin all of us," he answered. "Let him once get an inkling as to who he is and it will all be up with us."

"I have a young fellow in the library who hates him as much as I do, and he came here with me on purpose to tell me of a way to get square on him."

"Who is it—that lout of a fisherboy?"

"No; one who is twice as intelligent as he; one who can be trusted, too, I think."

"I'll see him after you have dined, and when I have taken a good look at him and heard him talk I'll tell you whether he can be trusted or not. I have never yet made a mistake."

"All right. You will see what sort of a judge I am."

The elder Everett entered his private room and Don joined Nagle.

"I might as well tell you what I want to right here," said the latter.

"All right; go ahead, if it will not take too long."

"It won't take very long."

"Proceed, then."

In a slow, measured voice Nagle related the conversation he had heard between our hero and Big Jake.

Don nodded approvingly.

"They will be on the water to-night," he said. "Now, then, if Joe Masterson could only fall overboard and be drowned, and—"

"He can easily do that."

"Ah, I see! You are coming to the proper point."

"Let's you and I go and get aboard the sailboat before they get there."

"Can we do it?"

"Certainly we can. I happen to know exactly where she lies, and the tide will not be up high enough to float her before an hour and a half from now."

"We will hurry through dinner, then, and go down to the beach."

"We can get there in six or seven minutes from here."

A few minutes later the two were eating a hurried meal.

For the second time Don Everett was plotting with a boy of the village against the life of our hero.

He had been afraid to allow Bill Edwards to go ahead after he had instructed him; as he became satisfied that the fellow was a coward and not to be trusted.

But Nagle! Well, he was a different sort of a boy. All Don

wanted was a nod of approval from his father after he had seen his guest and he was ready to proceed.

After the meal Don introduced his friend to the old man and then repaired to his room.

From a bureau drawer he took out two heavy revolvers and made sure that both were loaded.

When he came downstairs his father gave the nod he expected him to and then Nagle and he left the house.

It was now quite dark, but Nagle knew of a short cut to the beach, and they soon got there.

"There is the *Emma*," said he, pointing to a trim-looking sailboat about thirty feet long. "See, she isn't afloat yet."

Don nodded.

"There is no one around, either, as it happens," he remarked.

"No. Let's sneak aboard at once. We can hide under the deck over the bow."

Five minutes later the villainous pair were hidden in the forward end of the little boat.

Neither knew exactly what the other intended to do, but their presence meant danger to Joe Masterson and his friend, Jake Leeds.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STARTLING INTERRUPTION.

It was some time past eight o'clock when Joe and Jake came down to the sailboat.

The former carried an oyster rake, showing that he meant business, as far as the seed oysters were concerned.

"Is she afloat yet?" he asked of his companion.

"Hardly, I think, but we might be able to shove her off," was the reply, and Jake untied a rope from a ring in the little bulkhead and tossed it on deck.

Both boys had rubber boots on, so they waded into the rising tide and pushed the craft off without much exertion.

They quickly clambered aboard and began hauling upon the bow-line till the anchor came up.

The jib and mainsail were hoisted next and then, taking the tiller, Leeds pointed for Crook Creek.

"There is only one drawback about getting the seed," observed our hero as the boat glided along through the starlight, "and that is that as soon as we are seen working there others will join in, and it is against the law to work in the night time."

"That's so," nodded Jake. "But whether it is against the law or not to work on oyster beds at night, nearly all the men in the business at Bunn's Cove do it—not because they want to do anything wrong under cover of darkness, but because they want to go according to the tides."

"I know that, but I hear there is to be a watchman put on in a couple of weeks. The oyster association at Bunn's Cove is getting pretty strict."

"I think I shall put in a bid for the job of watchman," said Jake after a pause. "It requires a man with a sailboat, and I could do the job as well as any man."

"By jove!" exclaimed Joe; "the very thing! You go over to the cove to-morrow morning and put in your application. You get that job and we will be all right about the seed oysters."

"That's so!"

Meanwhile the boat was bowling along before a stiff breeze, leaving a wake of foam astern that glittered and sparkled in the starlight.

It was about two miles to Crook Creek, so named because it ran in anything but a straight line.

It was navigable for about two miles, but boats seldom had cause to go up it, outside of the crab fishers.

At the mouth, which was pretty wide, the water was pretty deep, and the tide ran strong.

Joe had accidentally discovered that this place contained millions of young oysters, or what are known as "spats."

From the trials he had made he estimated that there were at least three hundred bushels in the vicinity.

These were worth seventy cents a bushel, and a ready market could be found for them, but if they were planted and increased seven-fold in three years, as they should do, barring no accidents, the foundation for a fortune would be laid.

That is the way the young bicycle rider figured it, and he was about right.

As the *Emma* neared the mouth of the creek Joe let the jib come down, and, when Jake gave him the word, he let the anchor go.

The little craft quickly swung around with the tide.

"Jake, if you got that job as watchman you would have to build a little cabin house," observed Joe as he stepped down into the cockpit.

"Oh, I don't know, there is room enough for one or two persons to sleep up forward."

"I suppose there is, but it would be pretty cramped quarters, I am thinking."

"Well, get out that rake, now, and show me some of the seed."

Joe responded by allowing the steel-toothed instrument to drop overhead and go to the bottom.

The handle was thirty feet long and but four feet of it stuck above the surface.

"Low water is the proper time," said our hero as he worked the rake until it was nearly full of something.

"Yes; we'll come down again to-morrow night. I'll anchor the boat off so we won't have to wait for the tide."

Pretty soon Joe hauled up the rake and dumped a quantity of small oysters and shells in the bottom of the boat.

The oysters were about as big as half dollars, and the shells were literally covered with ones varying in size from a coffee bean to a chestnut.

"Whew!" exclaimed Jake Leeds; "ain't they nice!"

"I should say they were!"

At that moment they heard a noise behind them.

Lifting their heads, they beheld two forms standing over them with cocked revolvers!

Handkerchiefs with holes cut for the eyes covered the faces of the two, and, horrified at their unexpected appearance, Joe and Jake sank back in the boat.

CHAPTER IX.

WAS IT A DOUBLE MURDER?

"Death to the oyster thieves!" came in guttural tones from one of the masked figures.

It was not until then that Joe could recover himself sufficiently to speak. He had no idea who the disguised two were, but he realized that they might discharge the revolvers they held so menacingly.

"We are nothing of the kind," Joe answered as coolly as he could. "These oysters belong to us as much as any one else."

"Death to the oyster thieves!" repeated the same guttural voice. "Hold up your hands!"

There was nothing to do but to obey, so up went the hands of Joe and Jake.

Then one of the masked villains took both revolvers and pressed the muzzles of them against the foreheads of the boys, while his companion proceeded to bind them hand and foot with the rope that lay in the cockpit of the boat.

When the masked fellows had deposited them helpless in the bottom of the boat Joe looked up at them and said:

"See here, my friends, if this is a joke, you are carrying it a little too far."

Something like a sarcastic laugh was all the reply he got.

The big boy now spoke up.

"If you don't untie us right away you will be sorry for it."

As if they had not heard him at all, the pair stepped to the side of the boat.

One of them seized the rake and allowed it to drop overboard, as if to measure the depth of the water.

"It is plenty deep enough," he whispered to his companion, so low that our helpless young friends could not hear it.

"Yes," was the reply in the same tone. "Shall we do it?"

"You would never breathe it, would you?"

"Never!"

"Then get out those two chunks of pigiron in the bow of the boat."

The smaller of the two crept forward and soon returned, dragging two chunks of iron along with him.

Each of these had rings attached to them, and were used for anchors to be put out when a gale was blowing upon the coast and it was necessary to keep the boat from being washed ashore.

Neither Joe or Jake had the faintest idea what they were going to do with the "pig anchors," as they termed them, but they found out only too soon.

The masked villains were attaching the chunks of iron to their feet.

"Stop! Stop!" almost screamed Joe.

"Over with them!" exclaimed a gruff voice, and the boys were dragged from the cockpit.

As the same rope had been used to bind them, they were attached together.

The would-be murderers did not take time to sever the rope, but in a remarkably quick time pushed them overboard.

There was a prolonged splash, followed by two frenzied cries for help, and then all was still.

Joe Masterson went shooting to the bottom.

"Ugh!" exclaimed the taller of the murderous villains, pulling the handkerchief from his face; "that was something awful!"

It was Don Everett who spoke.

"Yes," murmured Nagle, with something like a shiver. "Let's get away from here. Up with the anchor!"

Everett sprang to the bow and began pulling the anchor in with all his might.

It was fully five minutes before they got the boat under way, and when they did neither knew how to sail her to advantage.

But the wind was fair, and they managed to get back to the Blueville beach much quicker than might have been expected.

Leaving the sailboat in as near the same spot as they could, they left her.

"Where are you going now?" asked Nagle.

"Home," was Don's retort.

"Come with me and I'll show you something you never dreamed of. We might as well make a night of it now."

"What can you show me in a slow, little country place like this?"

"As I said before, something you never dreamed of."

"I'll go with you, then."

"Good! You will find that what I am going to show you is just as much of a secret as the one we have divided between us."

Young Everett shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't let's ever talk of what happened to-night," he said.

Nagle gave a laugh.

"It is all over now," he observed, "and we are——"

"Stop!" thundered Don. "Not another word, or we shall quarrel."

"All right!" And for the next five minutes the pair walked along in silence.

"Where are you taking me to?" at length demanded Don, when he saw that they were nearing the outskirts of the village.

"You will be amply rewarded when you get there, so do not ask any further questions."

"But I will ask one more. How much farther is it?"

"Half a mile."

"All right, then. The next time I visit the place you are taking me to I'll use my bicycle."

"Don, do you believe in ghosts?" Nagle asked, without paying any attention to his companion's words.

"Ghosts? No, I don't believe in them. Why do you ask me that kind of a question?"

"I'm taking you to a haunted house."

"Oh, that big, old-fashioned house that stands back from the road surrounded by trees and shrubbery?"

"Yes."

"I have heard of that being haunted. But—pshaw! there are no such things as ghosts."

"A great many people think differently."

"I know they do; especially the simple country folk who live around here."

"Well, Don Everett, there are no ghosts in the house I am going to take you to. There is a band of counterfeiters there!"

CHAPTER X.

SAVED!

It would be a difficult task to describe the feelings of Joe and his companion as they sank beneath the surface of the water.

One thing—they thought their time had come.

But no one will give up life without a struggle.

With superhuman power they strove to free themselves.

And Providence stepped in to their aid.

The piece of pigiron was not tied securely to the feet of Jake Leeds, and he kicked it loose almost the instant he touched the water.

In their haste the villains had failed to make the knot secure.

As the same rope ran through the ring on the weight attached to our hero, that, of course, came off almost as soon.

The tide was rushing into the mouth of the creek with the speed of a race horse, and when the two helpless boys arose to the surface they were fully a hundred feet from the sailboat.

They just managed to get their breath and then under went their heads again.

In half a minute they were up again, and then another breath was taken.

They were now well up into the creek, and a bend in the meadow bank shut them from the view of those on the boat, even if it had been broad daylight.

"Keep cool, Jake!" Joe sputtered. "We are not dead yet. I——"

At that moment they struck against something with a shock which knocked what little breath they possessed completely out of them.

But that was not all. They remained just where they had struck, and their heads were above water.

The rope had been wound alternately about them, so they were very much in the shape of the Siamese Twins, and they had come in contact with a pile, striking it with their shoulders, Joe's head on one side and Jake's on the other.

The pile was one of many that formed the support for a bridge which ran over the creek.

As the boys looked up they recognized the bridge instantly.

It was fully two hundred yards from the mouth of the creek, and the central portion of it could be swung around to allow sailboats to pass.

The door was closed now, and the man who attended it had long since gone home.

It looked as though our young friends had to die, after all.

But no! As the swiftly running tide swung them around Joe felt something sharp graze against his head.

The rope that passed around the upper portion of their bodies had caught upon one of a number of spikes that had been driven into the pile.

And there it was, chafing and straining, while the boy's head was bumping against the spike above it.

A ray of hope shot through our hero's breast.

If the rope gave way they would have the use of their arms in a very few seconds.

Before he had time to tell Jake Leeds of what he had discovered there was a snap, and once more the two boys were whirling along with the current.

But half a minute later a fervent voice exclaimed:

"Thank God!"

It was Joe Masterson who spoke.

His hands were free and he was standing almost neck deep in the water, holding the head of Jake Leeds above the water while he unwound the rope from his body.

By a miracle the tide had whirled them shoreward, and upon a sand bar.

Rapidly Jake was relieved of his bonds, and then Joe kicked the rope from his own feet.

Two minutes later they stood upon the meadow bank, not far above the bridge.

Both were well-nigh exhausted, and staggering to a log, they sat down upon it.

"Jake, we are saved!"

"Yes, Joe," retorted the big fellow, mechanically.

"It was a miracle."

"Yes."

"Who could those two men have been who would dare commit such a crime?"

"I don't know."

"Could they have been oystermen who had their eyes on the seed oysters at the mouth of the creek?"

"I don't know."

"Don Everett couldn't possibly have had anything to do with it."

"I don't know," said Jake, speaking exactly as though he didn't know, or that he even had the least idea.

"We must find out who they were."

"Yes; we'll report 'em to father. He's a constable, you know."

"Jake, we won't report them to anybody."

"What!"

The big boy looked at his friend in astonishment.

"I mean what I say; we won't report them to anybody," repeated our hero. "I'll take the case in hand and endeavor to find out who my unknown enemies are. Don Everett might be bad enough to take my life, but it could not have been him, for no one knew but you and I that we were going to pay a visit to the mouth of the creek."

"Mebbe they were a couple of thieves who wanted to steal the boat," suggested Jake.

"That might be," nodded Joe.

"Anyhow, I never spoke a word to a living soul about where we were going or what you had told me," exclaimed the big boy decidedly.

"Neither did I mention it."

"Then they must have been thieves."

"Yes. We will walk back to Blueville beach, and if the Emma is not there we will know they were thieves."

"I didn't think a common thief would be so bad as to do what those fellows did," and Jake shook his head.

"It is hard to tell just how far a villain will go on some occasions."

"Let's go back home."

Dripping from the salt water, the pair walked down to the road that led to Blueville.

It was rather a long walk to the place on the beach where the Emma had been moored.

But they made the distance in good time and soon got there.

Much to their surprise, the boat was there.

Anchored in the spot where they had pushed her off was the Emma!

The mystery that confronted them was too much for them to solve that night, at any rate, and so they went off to their homes.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE COUNTERFEITERS' DEN.

Don Everett looked at Nagle in astonishment.

"Counterfeiters!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. Come on; the house will soon be in sight."

"All right; come on it is. I've started and I'll go with you."

It was well on toward the hour of midnight when the two precious young scoundrels halted in the road before the deserted property.

It was the identical spot Joe Masterson had heard the cry of a female from on the night he was training for the bicycle race.

Everything appeared so lonely and foreboding about the place that Don Everett hesitated when his companion vaulted lightly over the rickety fence.

But he was one of the kind who do not back down until made to, and, throwing aside all shades of superstition, he followed.

Through a growth of tangled vines and bushes they went, and presently they reached the walk leading to the house.

The walk was of brick, and it was so damp from the shade of the trees that it was covered with moss in many places.

It was slippery and uneven, too, and the boys were forced to proceed carefully to keep from falling.

Just before they got to the front door of the house Nagle took his friend by the arm and turned abruptly to the right, through a cluster of sweetly-scented rose bushes.

A minute later they stood before a little summer house, rotten with age.

They were forced to stoop to get inside this, as the timbers had fallen in some places and were leaning in every direction.

Don noticed that the place showed signs of being used, in spite of its tumble-down appearance.

He was just about to remark this when Nagle exclaimed:

"Hist!"

"What is it?"

"Do not be surprised at anything, but follow me."

The city boy nodded.

The next minute Nagle gave two sharp taps upon a slab of stone with the heel of his shoe.

Much to Don's surprise, two answering taps came from beneath the slab.

Nagle responded by giving three, and this was repeated.

Then he gave one, and seizing his companion, he clutched him tightly to him.

"Don't move!" he commanded in a whisper.

Before Everett knew what had happened he felt himself going downward.

The slab the two had been standing upon had descended.

It came to a stop about twelve feet below, with a jar that nearly caused Don to lose his balance.

Nagle pulled him off the remarkable elevator, and up it shot to the top again.

It had scarcely found its former place when a bright light flashed upon the two boys.

"Who have we here?" a voice demanded.

"Nagle and a friend," was the prompt reply.

"A friend? How dare you bring a friend here?"

"I have the same right as you. My friend has been weighed in the balance and found not wanting."

"Ah! 'Tis well, then. Proceed."

Don Everett gave something like a sigh of relief. He imagined at first that he was not wanted, but, being reassured by the man who stood before them with a lantern, he followed Nagle through a damp, narrow passage, with something like his usual composure.

The man followed with the lantern, holding it above his head, so as to light the way for them.

A few feet farther and they came to an iron door.

Without a word the man stepped forward and unlocked it.

Pulling it open, he ushered Don and Nagle into a cellar and then closed and locked it again, remaining on the outside.

The boys were now in the cellar of the so-called haunted house, and as Don looked around him he saw half a dozen men working in the place.

A long work-bench ran across one end of the cellar, and in the center of it was an old-fashioned hand printing press.

A man with a bald head and huge spectacles, who was industriously working with a pen on a pack of spurious banknotes, arose when he saw Nagle.

"Ah, my boy, what brings you here at this hour?"

"I came here to have a new member initiated, father," replied Nagle.

"A new member!" and the brow of the man he called father darkened.

"Yes, a new member. You want to join my father's band of money-makers, don't you, Don?"

"Yes," returned Don readily.

"What has he done to command our attention in this light?" asked the elder Nagle, for it really was the boy's father.

"He has done the most daring thing a person can do?" was the quick reply.

Everett shrugged his shoulders uneasily, for he had no doubt that the daring thing he had done meant murder.

"When?" demanded the leader of the counterfeiters.

"To-night."

"You speak the truth?"

"I certainly do."

"And there is no one on his track?"

"There is not—I am sure of this."

"Then he can join. Attention, men!"

Instantly the men in the cellar ceased their various occupations.

"Your name, young man," resumed the leader of the band, fixing his eyes on the city boy, who had unknowingly become a candidate for membership.

"Don Everett," was the reply.

The elder Nagle gave a start.

"Everett?" he said; "I have heard that name before. Before I proceed I'll—"

He did not finish the sentence, for at that instant the secret door of the cellar opened and a newcomer appeared on the scene.

Don Everett turned, and then a cry of amazement left his lips.

The newcomer was his father.

CHAPTER XII.

DON EVERETT IS SURPRISED.

"Father!"

It was Don Everett who uttered the words.

Unprincipled as he knew his father to be, he had no idea that he belonged to a gang of counterfeiters.

But such was plainly the case, for the senior Everett had free access to the place.

"Why, Don!" he gasped as he came face to face with his son.

"What in the world are you doing here?"

"The young man has just become a member of our band," spoke up Nagle's father. "We have to do the finishing touches to him yet. Calm yourself, Mr. Everett."

"He—he is my—my son!"

"So is this boy my son. I am proud to have him here; so should you be proud to have your son here."

"I am, but I had not the faintest idea of his coming here."

"I should have spoken to you about this place if I had known you were a member, Mr. Everett," observed young Nagle as he shook hands with the newcomer.

"Well, we will let it all pass. Proceed with the finishing touches to the new member."

Mr. Everett spoke in his usual tone of voice now.

Half an hour later Don was a duly qualified member of the counterfeiters' organization.

"We work but two nights in the week," said the captain of the gang. "What money we make is shipped away to our agents, and not a cent of it is passed anywhere near here. We turn out a ten-dollar bill that only the most minute investigation can discover the difference between it and the genuine. Business is flourishing now, and in a year's time we will all be able to retire, I will assign you and my boy to a special duty in a few days. I know I can trust him, and he recommends you so highly that I feel safe in trusting you."

"Thank you," returned Don, not a little pleased at what the captain said.

It was well toward daylight when Don Everett and his father left the counterfeiters' den and went home.

On the way the villainous young man related how he and Nagle had disposed of Joe Masterson and his friend, and, bad as he was, the father shuddered as he listened to it.

But he was jubilant, for all that.

Just why he was anxious to have Joe put out of the way Don could never learn—in fact, he never knew there was such a person as young Masterson until his family took up their summer residence at Blueville a few short weeks before.

"Don, your step-mother must never know of the business I am engaged in," observed the elder villain just before they entered the gate of the house they resided in.

"No," answered Don; "or Agnes, either."

"Certainly not."

"Father, why did you go into such a risky business?" asked the young man as he paused at the gate.

"For the money there is in it."

"But you are rich, and have been for a long time."

"What I have is liable to be wrested from me at any—but, no, not now, after what has happened to-night."

"Joe Masterson will never claim it—if that is what you mean."

"Tut, tut, my boy. Say no more about it. Be careful how you talk, too."

Don Everett did not sleep very well that night.

Strive as he might, he could not shake the thoughts of the adventures of the night from his mind, and shortly after daybreak he got up and went out on the lawn, where a hammock was swung.

A cup of coffee settled his nerves somewhat, and then he was ready to face most anything.

About nine o'clock he mounted his wheel and rode down to the post office, in accordance with his usual custom.

In the post office he met Frank Caldwell, who saluted him rather coldly.

"He hasn't heard what happened to his friend last night," mused the young scoundrel. "Well, it will be a long time before

the bodies are discovered—perhaps never—and if they are I will never be suspected."

Finally Frank came over to him.

"Did you hear what the village tradesmen are going to do?" he asked.

"No. What?"

"Get up a bicycle race for next Saturday."

"Is that so?"

"Yes; they have fixed it up among themselves, without us knowing it, but it leaked out this morning. Now it is to be made public, and the bills will be out this afternoon. They are going to put up some big prizes, I hear."

"I shall practice for it," said Don.

"Yes, I would if I were you. But you can't expect to beat Joe Masterson."

"See here!" exclaimed Don, with flushing cheeks; "I don't claim that I have been riding as good as Masterson, but I'll bet you twenty-five dollars that I'll win the mile race, if they have one, next Saturday."

The two were standing in front of the post office building, it being closed on account of it being Sunday, and quite a few people were passing at the time.

"I never bet," retorted Frank Caldwell, shrugging his shoulders.

"But I do, though," said a voice behind them.

Turning, they beheld the man who kept the village hotel.

"Oh, well," observed Don, "if you want to take the bet you are welcome."

"Certainly I'll take it. You offered to lay twenty-five dollars that you would win the bicycle race next Saturday?"

"I did."

"Well, put up your money in Frank Caldwell's hands."

Young Everett did so.

The hotel keeper covered it and the grocer's son placed the roll in his pocket.

"You won't be one, two, three with Joe Masterson," the man said as he went away.

"We'll see about that," Don retorted with a laugh.

At this juncture two forms turned the corner and almost instantly ran into the two boys.

Don Everett turned as white as a sheet and caught Frank by the arms to keep from falling.

And no wonder! Joe Masterson and Jake Leeds stood before him!

They could not help noticing the strange actions of the New York boy when he saw them, and Jake approached him and asked him what was the matter with him.

He was breathing hard and was otherwise much agitated.

"I can't understand it," he muttered. "Joe Masterson and Jake Leeds alive and well! What does it mean, anyway? I'll swear they went direct to the bottom in the deep water of the bay!"

The problem was more than he could solve, and a cold sweat broke out on his forehead.

By a powerful effort he partly regained his composure and mounted his wheel again.

Straight for the home of Nagle he rode.

He found the young villain seated on the porch smoking a very big cigar and apparently enjoying the fresh June morning.

"Hello, Nagle," he cried.

"Hello!" was the retort as Nagle sprang to his feet. "What's the matter with you? You look as though you had seen a ghost."

"I have seen worse than that," was the hoarse rejoinder. Then in a whisper he added:

"I have seen Joe Masterson and Jake Leeds! They are both alive and as well as you or I!"

Nagle laughed.

"You have got it bad," said he. "Come in the house. A good drink of whiskey will settle your nerves. Come! not another word till you have swallowed it."

Don followed him to the neatly-furnished front room and gulped down the glass of whiskey that was handed to him.

A sigh of relief escaped his lips as the fiery fluid coursed through his veins.

"Now you feel better," observed Nagle as the color came back to Don's cheeks.

"Yes, I am all right now."

"Well, now tell me why you talked at random when you came in the gate."

"I did not talk at random. Joe Masterson and Jake Leeds were standing on the post office corner talking with Frank Caldwell about the race next Saturday but a few minutes ago, and it is quite likely they are there yet."

Nagle's face turned pale.

"Do you mean this?" he questioned.

"I do. I was talking to them myself."

"How—how were they saved?" cried the puzzled Nagle as he poured out a glass of liquor for himself and drank it at a gulp.

"That is a mystery."

"Well, if they are not dead they will die before the week is out. Don, we will lure them to the haunted house!"

CHAPTER XIII.

BEFORE THE BLUEVILLE ROAD RACE.

Neither Joe nor Jake Leeds said anything of the foul attempt on their lives to a living being, but both were constantly on the alert for danger. They both noticed, however, the remarkable behavior of Don Everett.

Joe could hardly make himself believe that Don Everett had been one of the masked villains in the boat, yet at times he felt that he was.

He knew that both Everett and Nagle hated him, but his unknown enemies—who were they?

During the past few days Edwards had treated him fairly well, and this was one consolation to him.

On Monday morning the fishing business started in briskly and Joe was pretty busy.

He did not have time to ride his wheel until after supper, and then, in the company of half a dozen club members, he took a spin over the course the races were to be run on.

There were to be three open races—a one, two and five-mile race—and the rest of the events were confined strictly to residents of Blueville.

Tuesday night Joe went down to the grocery store and entered himself in all three of the open races and in the mile straight-away race for the championship of the village.

The following night he found that Don Everett had entered in every race that he had, with the exception of the five-mile.

This seemed rather curious to our young friend, but he soon drove it from his mind.

So watchful was Joe during the week that Everett and Nagle did not have a ghost of a chance to lure him to the haunted house.

This lonesome building had to be passed in the five-mile race on Saturday, and in his practice spins there was always some one with him, so the young villains did not feel safe to do anything to draw his attention to the house.

Joe and Jake did not bother with the seed oysters again during the week, but they had not given them up by any means.

When Saturday came our hero did not go to work.

During the morning he indulged in a light exercise, preparatory to what he was going to do in the afternoon.

At the table during the noonday meal he received a genuine surprise.

Bill Edwards told him he hoped he would win ever race he went in.

"If you mean that, Bill, I thank you," said Joe.

"Oh, I wouldn't say it if I didn't mean it," retorted Bill. "I want to apologize to you for all the mean things I've ever done to you, too. I'm going to be a different fellow from what I have been, and I'm going to save up and get a bicycle like yours."

"All right, Bill. I'll get you one at cost price, which will be fifty dollars. Come to think of it, I have noticed that you have worked harder this week than I ever saw you do before."

"I'm glad you noticed it, Joe. Well, I mean every word I have just said."

Old man Edwards ceased eating and his wife stood in the center of the kitchen, with the teapot in her hand, both the picture of amazement.

They couldn't comprehend what the friendly conversation between the two boys meant.

Finally the old woman blurted out:

"What's goin' ter happen?"

"Nothing, mother," retorted Bill. "How much of my money have you got that I gave to you to save for me?"

"Thirty-four dollars."

"Give it to me, will you?"

"What do you want with it?"

"I'm going to give it to Joe to save for me till I get enough, so's he can send for the bicycle."

"Land sake alive!"

"Thunderation!" chimed in the old man.

Mrs. Edwards, without another word, went upstairs and a few minutes later came down with the money.

She handed it to Bill, who in turn passed it over to our hero, with the words:

"Here, Joe, keep this for me. I'll give you some every week till I get enough for the wheel. It's real kind of you to get it for me at the agent's price."

"Well, I swan!"

As Mrs. Edwards uttered this exclamation she wiped a tear from her eye.

"Jim," said she, turning to her husband, "do you know that this makin'-up between Bill and Joe here has done me good? I feel happier than I have in many a day. I used to be down on them pesky bicycles, but I am goin' to help Bill to get one, even if I have to live on salt pork and rye flour all winter!"

Out of the room she flounced and made a second journey to the upper portion of the house.

When she came down she had a woollen stocking in her hand.

"Here, Joe," she said in a husky voice, "just see how much money there is in that."

Much surprised, the boy dumped the contents of the stocking on the table.

He soon counted out ten dollars and forty cents.

"How much does that make, along with what Bill gave you?" she queried.

"Forty-four dollars and forty cents," promptly replied our hero.

"How much more does he want to get the wheel?"

"Five dollars and sixty cents."

"Mebbe I could borry that much from Caldwell, ther store-keeper," spoke up the old man, rising to his feet.

If some one had discharged a gun in the room his three hearers could not have been more astonished.

Jim Edwards talk like that! It seemed impossible.

Joe now arose from the table, the forty-four dollars and forty cents in his hand.

"One minute, please," he said to Edwards, who was just going to say something. "Bill, what are the specifications you would like to have on your bicycle?"

"Just like yours, only a seventy gear instead of a seventy-seven."

"Bill, I'll make you a present of the balance of the money and order the wheel by the next mail!"

As our hero uttered these words the entire Edwards family burst into tears.

"You are the best fellow that ever lived," blurted out Bill.

"Ain't this done me good, though—ain't this done me good!" cried Mrs. Edwards as she flung herself in a rocker.

It was the happiest moment Joe Masterson had ever experienced since he had been washed ashore from the wreck.

"The next mail leaves at one o'clock," said he, "so I'll ride right over to the post office and send the order for the wheel."

As he left the house he heard the old man say:

"Old gal, you said this here makin'-up business between our boy and Joe had made you feel good. Well, it ain't only made me feel good, but it has sorter learned me a lesson. I ain't never goin' to touch another drop of liquor, and I'm goin' to save my money and buy one of them double bicycles, so's you and me can go out ridin' once in a while!"

Joe lost no time in riding to the post office, and when the mail went out it carried the money order to pay for Bill Edwards' bicycle.

CHAPTER XIV.

DON EVERETT LOSES.

"Well, what do you think of my chances this afternoon?"

"I don't know, I am sure."

"What! Don't know? You want to see me win, don't you?"

There was a time when I wanted to see you win, but I've sorter changed my mind to-day."

The speaker were Don Everett and Bill Edwards. The former dismounted from his wheel at the crossroads when he saw the ungainly form of the fisherboy coming.

"What! Bill, have you gone back on me entirely? I thought you hated the young upstart of a Joe Masterson?"

"I did—I mean I thought I did—but to-day I have found that I like him, instead of hating him."

The face of Don darkened.

"You know what you partly agreed to do to him," he whispered in a hoarse tone.

"Partly, yes; but I didn't do it, just the same. And I want to tell you, Don Everett, that I would die before I would do it now."

Bill became so excited when he said this that he shook his fist in Don's face.

A devilish gleam came in the eyes of the young member of the gang of counterfeiters. He looked on all sides of him to make sure that no one was approaching, and then, placing his bicycle against a fence rail, pulled an ugly-looking dagger from his pocket.

"You are a fool, Bill Edwards," he hissed, "and I am going to kill you before you get us both into trouble!"

He expected to see Bill cower down and beg for mercy, but no such thing happened.

Instead the fisherboy stepped back a couple of paces and whipped out a brand-new revolver from his pocket.

"Put up your knife, Don Everett!" he said calmly. "This is the pistol you gave me to kill Joe Masterson with, and you said it was warranted never to miss fire. When I brought it back and told you I would not do the job, but would never mention what passed between us, you told me to keep it, as it might come in handy some day. Well, that day has come. If you don't do exactly as I say now I'll see how close I can come to your heart!"

If ever Don Everett was surprised in his life he was at this moment.

He had really intended to murder the boy, whom he took to be an ignorant coward, but when the revolver flashed upon him and the ominous words rang out he was almost struck dumb.

For the space of five seconds he stood still in his tracks. Then the dagger slowly went back in his pocket.

Bill lowered his revolver, and as he did so Don grabbed his bicycle, lifted it out in the road and mounted it.

"Don't say anything about what has happened between us," he called out to his conqueror.

"I won't," retorted Bill, "because I'd be ashamed to have Joe Masterson know that I was ever in a plot to take his life."

Everett soon disappeared from sight, and Bill, after placing his revolver back in his pocket, walked on in the direction of the post office.

Several members of the bicycle club were congregated here, among whom was Joe Masterson.

The moment our hero saw Bill he walked over to him.

"The money and order for your bicycle are on their way to New York," he said.

"Thank you," retorted Bill. "I'll never forget your kindness, Joe."

"I am going to propose you as a member of our club at the next meeting."

"Will you?" and Bill showed how glad he would be if he could only call himself one of the Bicycle Boys of Blueville.

"Certainly I will, and you will go through, too."

"I hope so."

Joe was now called by the managers of the race and Bill was left to his own reflections.

The first to be run off was a novice race, which was won with ease by Frank Caldwell.

Next came the one-mile open—half a mile out over the macadamized road and back.

Don Everett, in his racing costume, showed up just in time for the start.

He, Joe and the young fellow who made the best showing at the Juniper races were the only entries.

The postmaster acted as starter and the grocer as timekeeper.

Some few minutes before the start Bill Edwards hurried off down the road.

It struck him that he would like to see the racers when they made the turn for the finish.

When the pistol cracked the Juniper boy, according to his usual custom, shot ahead.

He was good at starting, but poor at finishing.

Don Everett managed to drop in behind him, and our hero was content to pedal along a few feet in the rear of both.

That it was to be no loafing race the crowd soon saw.

The fellow from Juniper showed that he possessed an unusual supply of steam, and the pace he set was a hot one.

At the half-mile turn he was still ahead, with Everett second.

All three reached the line at such a speed that they could not make the turn, and so dismounted and swung their wheels around.

The Juniper boy started first and Everett followed.

Just as Joe started a ragged-looking negro darted from the bushes, holding a huge cordwood stick in his hands.

He was just about to throw it in front of our hero's wheel when he was seized from behind and flung to the ground.

Joe saw the whole thing in one fleeting glance.

He did not recognize the negro, but he saw that the person who had saved him from disaster was Bill Edwards.

But he had no time to think. He must win the race now at all hazards.

Biting hard upon the toothpick he had in his mouth, he leaned over his handlebars and sent the wheel fairly flying along the road.

In less than a quarter of a mile he overtook the other two riders.

Don Everett scowled at him as our hero glided past him and dropped into second place.

A moment later and the finish line was in sight.

Joe felt safe. He nerved himself for the final spurt.

Presently he shot ahead like a meteor and crossed the tape a winner by over a dozen feet.

A hearty cheer went up from the spectators who lined the roadside.

The young champion still held the title.

The Juniper man came in second and Don Everett was last.

"My ankle is sore and I should not have gone in the race," was the excuse he put forth. "I am done for to-day."

"That's all right, young man," laughed the hotel-keeper as he took the money they had bet from Frank Caldwell. "You never saw the day that you could ride as fast as Joe Masterson, and you know it. Acknowledge the corn and save your credit."

Don made no reply, but walked away and put on his regular riding-suit.

He was so filled with rage and disappointment that he could not speak.

Like Joe, he had recognized who it was that prevented the darky from throwing the young champion from his wheel.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FINISH OF THE GREAT ROAD RACE.

When Bill Edwards flung the darky to the ground the darky sprang to his feet and before Bill could prevent him he dashed away into the woods.

"I'll catch that fellow and hand him over to a constable or bu'st a lung!" cried the excited fisherboy as he started in pursuit.

As has before been stated, Bill Edwards was rather clumsy.

On the other hand, the darky was agile and quick.

But Bill managed to follow him through a strip of woodland and saw him take across the field in the direction of the village.

The darky entered an apple orchard and Bill lost sight of him.

But he kept right on just the same, and presently came in sight of a house.

Bill made his way out to the road, but saw no signs of the individual he had been pursuing.

"It is funny why he should run right into town like this," he mused. "Who lives here, anyhow? Why, it's the Widow Nagle!"

Sure enough, the house was that occupied by the Nagles.

"I guess I'll ask Mrs. Nagle if she saw the nigger go by," resumed Bill as he entered the gate and approached the door.

He suited the action to the word, and received an answer in the negative.

"I'll go and report this to the squire," thought Bill, and he started for the grocery.

When he got there they were just about to start another race.

This was for married men only, and was rather novel.

There were but seven married men in Blueville who owned wheels, and all of them were entered and were on hand, ready for business.

The prize was a parlor suite, which had been presented to the committee by an enterprising furniture concern from a neighboring city.

Half a mile out and half a mile in was the ground to be covered, and it might be justly said that this event was the most interesting of the day to the older people of the village.

Bill waited to see the start before he sought Joe or the squire. But he had learned that Joe had won the preceding race with hands down.

There were enough boys about to tell him this without asking.

The pistol cracked and the married men's race was on.

In exactly three-twenty-five a man named Fred Hopping crossed the finish line.

He was bald-headed, forty and wiry, and was well liked by the community.

The cheer he got was almost equal to that received by Joe.

The parlor suite was his, and everybody seemed glad of it.

The rest of the seven came in one and two at a time, the last covering the distance in six minutes.

When the excitement had subsided Bill sought out Joe and told him of how he had foiled the darky and then failed to catch him.

Joe shook his head.

"It seems awful strange that I have so many enemies," said he.

"Bill, I'll appoint you to look out for me during the rest of the races. I'll get Jake Leeds and Tom Simmons to ride along the course and be on the watch, too."

"All right," retorted Bill, heartily pleased with his commission he had received from the champion. "Shall I tell the squire or constable anything about the darky?"

"Not now. The two-mile race is next. Go on down to the turning point."

Bill started off on foot and our hero got ready for the race.

There were only two to compete in this race, since Don Everett had dropped out—Joe and the young fellow from Juniper—and it promised to be a lively one.

Everett hung around the starting place, but had nothing to say.

Presently he was joined by the scoundrel Nagle, who just came from home on his wheel, he informed those who inquired.

The two had a short, whispered conversation, during which Don ground his teeth more than once.

When the pistol cracked and the two riders were off Don said to his companion:

"It must be the haunted house—that will play the wind-up in Masterson's case."

Nagle nodded and then the pair mingled with the crowd to await the result of the race.

As was expected by nearly every one present, Joe won.

But he was scheduled to take part in two races yet, and many were afraid he would become tired before he had completed them.

When it came time for the five-mile event to take place our hero was as fresh as a daisy.

He had the same opponent in this race, and that was all.

Again he won.

An obstacle race was the next, which was won by a rider from the Juniper Club.

Then the one-mile straight-away race came.

As has been stated, this was for residents of Blueville alone.

When the time came Joe was the only one to wheel his bicycle up the scratch.

Don Everett had dropped out, and there was no one in the village who would ride against the young champion.

After a great deal of dilly-dallying, it was decided that Joe should ride over the course against time.

The starting point was a mile outside the village, and the finish at the tape which was stretched across the road in front of the grocery store.

Joe rode the mile, without accident or mishap, in 2:02 $\frac{1}{4}$.

It was the fastest he had ever done, and many records were smashed into smithereens.

Altogether it was the greatest day Blueville had ever seen.

And Joe Masterson, the crack cyclist, was the hero of the day.

CHAPTER XVI.

JOE SAVES A GIRL'S LIFE.

Half an hour after the races, when Joe was riding toward his home, he was suddenly startled by the shriek of a female.

Putting on speed, he turned a corner just in time to witness a startling sight.

A farmer, an enraged bull and a girl were the actors in the scene.

The girl was lying in the center of the road, with a badly used-up wheel near her, the bull was rushing forward to gore her and the farmer was endeavoring to hold back the enraged animal by a rope that was tied around its horns.

Joe was one of the sort of boys who are quick to think and quick to act.

He comprehended the fact that in less than five seconds the

bull would succeed in tearing the life out of the helpless girl with his cruel, sharp horns.

Pressing hard upon his pedals, he bore down upon the bull with the speed of a whirlwind.

He wore a red sweater, and meant to attract the animal's attention.

The next instant something happened that the farmer will remember to his dying day.

Joe whizzed close to the bull's nose, striking him a blow between the eyes with his clinched fist as he shot past.

With a bellow of rage the animal left the helpless girl and started after him.

Of course he stood no show to catch the fleet cyclist, and, letting go the rope, the farmer flew to the girl's assistance and soon had her out of harm's way.

Just then Don Everett came along.

His face was very white when he saw the girl.

It was his step-sister, Agnes Armour.

"What is the matter, Agnes?" he asked.

"I was very near death, Don," was the trembling reply. "If it had not been for the brave boy who won all the races to-day I would not be alive now."

"That's right," spoke up the farmer. "If Joe Masterson had not cum along jist as he did nothin' could have saved the gal. My! but I never seed anything like it afore!"

Don bit his lips, but said nothing.

"Take me home, Don," said Agnes. "Some one will take my wheel to the repair shop for you."

By this time quite a crowd had gathered, and it was no trouble to get a man to take charge of the wrecked bicycle.

As the trembling girl and her step-brother were about to set out for home Joe came riding back.

"The bull is corralled in Mr. Brown's yard," he said, "so the danger is all over."

"I want to thank you, Mr. Masterson, for saving my life," cried Agnes, starting forward. But Don pulled her back.

"Here is a dollar for you," he said, tossing Joe a bill.

"I don't want your money," was the hot rejoinder, and, tipping his hat to the girl, he rode away.

When Joe got home he found old Jim Edwards and his wife to be in just as good humor as when he left. A good supper was waiting for him, and he noticed that the kitchen presented more of a homelike appearance than it ever had before.

"So you won 'em all, eh, Joe?" said the old man, with a smile of pleasure.

"Yes, uncle, I am glad to say I did."

"Jim, tell him what you heerd 'em say down at the store," spoke up Mrs. Edwards.

"That's so. Joe, they do say as you'll be able to beat the champion fellow of the hull country afore the summer is over."

Joe shook his head.

"I don't expect to get up as high in racing circles as that," he retorted. "Where is Bill? Hasn't he got back yet?"

"No; it's time for him, too," replied the changed housewife.

While Joe was thinking the seed oysters at the mouth of Crook Creek came into his mind.

He concluded to tell old man Edwards about them and give him a chance to make some money, along with himself and Jake Leeds.

In as few words as possible he related how he had located the bed and hired a piece of ground at Bunn's Cove.

"Now, you and Bill go in with Jake and I and help us get them up and plant them and we will all make some money," he added.

"I'll do it, by Jove!" was the happy retort. "Great Jupiter! but this has been a great day, and all on account of a bicycle. Joe, I'll do just as you say in this matter."

"Speakin' of bicycles, Joe, did you order Bill's?" queried Mrs. Edwards.

"Yes, ma'am. It ought to be here by Tuesday night."

"Good!"

"Good!" added Jim, with a nod of pleasure.

Joe finished his meal, and still Bill had not showed up.

He felt like having a talk with the boy before he went out, so he started in at cleaning his wheel while he was waiting.

It was nearly eight o'clock when Bill did come, and then he came in very much excited.

Without a word to his father or mother, he ran up to Joe.

Placing his mouth close to our hero's ear, he whispered:

"I saw the nigger again, and I followed him up to where he hangs out!"

"What!"

"That's right. He went into the old summer house near the haunted house less than an hour ago, and when I got there he was gone!"

"Do you really mean it, Bill?"

"I can't be mistaken. My eyes are good, as you know."

A sudden resolve came over our hero.

"Bill," said he, "we will pay a visit to the haunted house this very night."

CHAPTER XVII.

BILL DISAPPEARS.

The cut to Jake Leeds' house was a short one, and the two boys did not let the grass grow under their feet.

Jake was just coming out the gate with his wheel when they got there.

"Put that up!" sang out Joe. "I want you to go somewhere on foot."

"All right," retorted the big fellow; "I was just coming over to see you. Hello, Bill, I am glad to meet you. You did a clever act in preventing the unknown darky from upsetting Joe. I want to shake hands with you on the strength of it!"

He put out his hand, and Bill showed his pleasure as he shook it.

In a low tone our hero related what Bill had seen, and told him of the mission they were on.

"Certainly I'll go with you," said Jake. "Wait till I put my wheel in the house."

In a few minutes he came out.

"Have you fellows got pistols?" he whispered.

"I have," promptly retorted Bill.

"I have one, but it is home," said Joe.

"You ought to have brought it."

"I suppose I had, but I came away in such a hurry that I never thought of it."

"You can take mine, Joe," spoke up Bill. "If it becomes necessary to use it you can do more with it than I could."

"No, you keep it, Bill. It isn't likely we will have to do any shooting. Ghosts can't be hurt with bullets, anyhow."

"Come on," exclaimed Jake Leeds; "we are losing time here."

"Joe has got to take my revolver," said Bill, in a dogged tone.

"Well, I'll take it, more to please you than anything else," and our hero took the weapon and placed it in his hip pocket.

"We want to keep quiet and not talk too loud," he added as they struck the highway that led past the haunted house.

His companions nodded, and but very little conversation was indulged in during the walk to the near vicinity of their destination.

It had been overcast ever since the sun went down, and the east wind shook the leafy foliage and caused a rustling sound that made the three boys think of September.

Though it was the month of June the weather did not feel like it.

When they came in sight of the haunted house the first drops of rain began falling.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Jake in a low tone; "this is going to be a nasty night."

"Just the kind of night for the ghosts to walk," added Joe, with a right laugh.

"Don't talk about ghosts," whispered Bill, hoarsely. "Remember we came here to find the strange nigger—don't forget that."

"All right!" and his friends reassured him by patting him on the shoulders.

Joe was the first to crawl through a piece of broken fence.

As might be supposed, Bill Edwards was the last.

His courage was gradually leaving him, for he was just superstitious enough to think that the old house was really the abode of ghosts and goblins, and that they had been instrumental enough in the mysterious disappearance of the darky.

But, somehow, he felt comparatively safe so long as he kept close to Joe Masterson, and once on the premises of the old house he stuck to him like a leech.

It was in the neighborhood of ten in the evening when the trio arrived at the place.

The rain, once it got started, began to come down steadily, and they all comprehended that if they did not seek shelter soon they would become wet to the skin in fifteen minutes' time.

"We will go directly to the spot where you last saw the darky," whispered Joe, drawing his revolver. "I guess I may as

well have this ready, in case a ghost or a make-believe ghost does appear."

"A good idea," returned Jake, and out came his pistol.

Bill said nothing, but trembled considerably.

The noise of the falling rain allowed them to approach the house without making a sound that could be heard twenty feet from them.

Soon they were in the very shadow of the building and close to the old summer house.

Joe was brave as a lion, but somehow he felt a shiver run down his spine as he surveyed the gloomy-looking place.

But nothing daunted, he approached the summer house.

"Here, Bill," he whispered, in a low tone, "show us exactly where the negro was when he disappeared."

"He walked right in there," was the reply. "He——"

Before he could finish the sentence an unseen hand seized him by the collar and he was whisked through the doorway of the summer house.

With a cry of alarm Jake Leeds sprang back.

"What is the matter?" cried Joe, who had not seen the cause of the sudden movement of Bill.

"Something yanked him right into the summer house," was the hoarse reply of Jake.

Placing his revolver in his left hand Joe struck a match with the other and approached the doorway of the summer house.

A cry of consternation left his lips.

Bill was not there!

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT HAPPENED TO BILL.

As the reader may have guessed, the negro was no other than young Nagle in disguise.

It was he who pulled the unsuspecting Bill into the summer house, and shot downward on the elevator with him.

He had heard the sounds of the boy above, but had not calculated on there being three to contend with, so he quickly decided to capture Joe and let the rest go.

When he seized Edwards and shot below in the darkness he thought sure it was Joe he had.

Bill was too frightened to struggle much, so the moment the elevator struck the stone floor of the passage Nagle flung him into the arms of a man, who promptly struck him on the head with a sandbag.

As limp as a dishrag the boy settled down upon the floor.

Nagle shot the elevator up so quickly that inside of a minute from the time he had dragged Bill upon it the thing was in its former place.

Don Everett stood behind the man who had rendered Bill unconscious, and the moment Nagle gave the signal that everything was all right he flashed a light upon the scene.

As his eyes rested upon the pallid face of their victim he uttered a cry of disgust.

"This isn't Masterson!" he cried; "it's that fool of a Bill Edwards!"

"What!" exclaimed Nagle; "could I have made a mistake like that?"

"You could, and have, it seems."

"Don't talk so loud," cautioned the man. "Those above might hear you."

Without another word the three picked up Bill and conducted him along the passage and into the counterfeiters' den.

"What have you here?" demanded Nagle's father, coming forward.

Evidently he had known nothing of what the boys were up to.

"It is a fellow we want to get rid of," replied Nagle.

"The one Everett is so anxious to see disposed of?"

"No; I thought it was him when I nabbed this fellow. Masterson was right there by the summer house, though, when I hauled this blockhead in. I don't see how I could have made such a mistake."

"Mistake!" cried the captain; "you have made the biggest mistake of your life! Do you mean to say you hauled this boy upon the elevator when his friend was outside?"

"There were two others there," answered Nagle, a little frightened at the way his father spoke.

"Do you want to ruin our business and have us all go to Trenton prison?"

"No, no!"

"Then take the boy out at once before he comes to. You ought to know that those who were with him will go back to Blueville and bring a crowd here who will tear the building down in their efforts to find him. Away with him at once! Drop him on the road somewhere, and be sure that you do no further harm to him."

"Which way shall we go out?"

As Nagle asked this question he turned to Don, and the two picked up the unconscious form.

"Not by the way you came in, by any means," retorted his father. "Take the long passage."

The man who had assisted them quickly ran to a corner of the cellar and seizing a ring pulled a small door open.

"In with him!" he said.

Don Everett had no idea where he was going, but he did not hesitate to help drag Bill into the passage.

Once they were through, the door closed with a thud and they were in total darkness.

"Come on," whispered Nagle. "I have been here before. We can't get lost, for the passage is too narrow for that."

On they went for about five hundred feet, dragging their burden along as though he had been a sack of grain.

At length they came to an iron door, and Nagle lighted a match.

"This passage is supposed to have been built in the time of the revolution," he said. "It passes clean under the strip of woods in the rear of the house, and here we are at the beach."

"Good!" exclaimed Don; "we will leave him here on the beach then. Your scheme was not so good, after all."

"No; I had no idea that father would look at the thing the way he did."

The iron door was opened and the villainous pair passed out into the foul-smelling cave, dragging the unconscious Bill with them.

The outside of the door was neatly covered by a slab of stone of the exact kind that lined the back wall of the cave, and when closed no one would imagine that there was such a thing as a door there.

Out upon the sandy beach of the bay they pulled Bill, and left him with his pale face upturned and the drizzling rain pouring upon him.

The two scoundrels had barely got back into the passage when he came to.

The fresh air and falling rain worked wonders for him.

Much dazed he struggled to a sitting posture.

It took him some time to regain his faculties, and when he did so he ejaculated:

"Thunder!"

Then he felt of his aching head and got upon his feet.

"Where am I?" he gasped, and then remembering who had been with him, he began shouting with all his might:

"Joe! Jake! Hey, Joe!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A WEEK OF PEACE.

"Bill has gone!"

It was Joe Masterson who spoke.

"I—I—I can't see," sputtered Jake Leeds as the match flickered and went out.

Our hero promptly struck another.

Then, with white faces and staring eyes, the pair peered into the summer house.

It was certainly devoid of a human being.

With Joe in the lead they investigated every inch of the ground surrounding the summer house.

The bushes were trampled down and pulled aside, but with no avail.

After this they made a complete circuit of the house.

But the result was the same—Bill could not be found.

At length the two boys paused beneath an apple tree.

At this juncture they heard a faint cry.

Both listened.

As if to be assistance to them, the storm lulled for a few seconds.

Then they heard the voice of Bill Edwards calling their names.

He was a considerable distance off by the sound of his voice, but that was nothing. Joe and Jake started off like a whirlwind the instant they had located the direction the cries came from.

"He's in the woods!" exclaimed Jake.

"Yes," and his friend nodded.

But they passed through the strip of woods at the rear of the house and came upon the beach without finding the missing boy.

"Bill! Bill!" called out Joe; "where are you?"

A cry of delight was the answer, and Edwards came running toward them.

"Here I am!" he yelled.

The next moment the two boys came face to face with the missing Bill.

They seized him as though he had been a very valuable piece of stolen property just returned.

"Where have you been?" demanded our hero.

"I dunno!" was Bill's reply.

"What happened to you?" Jake queried.

"I dunno," repeated Bill.

"You don't know where you have been or what happened to you?" asked Joe.

"No."

"How is that?"

"The ghosts got me and put me to sleep. I thought I was gone, I did."

"Then you don't know where you went when we were standing in front of the summer house at the haunted house?"

"No; all I know is that something grabbed me and started into the grave with me. I went down into the ground and then something made me go to sleep. Do you know," and the fisherboy lowered his voice, "I think it was the ghosts that got hold of me."

"Pshaw!" cried Joe. "I see it all now. 'Some one grabbed you just as you reached the door of the summer house; you fainted, and they carried you off here. That's the kind of ghosts they are.'"

"They are ghosts, all right," and Bill nodded in a dogged manner.

"So you can't tell us how you got here, so far away from the house?"

"I couldn't if I tried ever so hard. Joe, if I ever told you the truth I am doing it now."

"Let's get away from here," spoke up Jake. "I have had enough of the haunted house for one night."

"Yes," eagerly exclaimed Bill; "don't go back there."

Completely nonplused our hero followed the two boys along the beach.

That night Joe slept little, and Bill only retired to dream of ghosts and goblins.

Joe did not go out with his bicycle much for several days.

On Monday the fishing was excellent, and as there was a large demand for them he had all he could do.

Tuesday night Bill's bicycle arrived, and there was great rejoicing in the Edwards household.

Bill had promised Joe to say nothing of what had occurred on the night they paid a visit to the haunted house, and he faithfully kept his word.

As Bill was clumsy it took him some time to learn, but by Thursday evening he was able to ride up to the post office and back.

On Friday old man Edwards got the privilege of using the boat belonging to Jake Leeds' father for a few days, and that night he, Bill, Joe and Jake paid a visit to the bed of the natural growth oysters.

A fair trial satisfied all hands that there was a "mint of money" there, as they termed it, and a plan was laid out to work the bed for all it was worth.

Three oyster skiffs were to be brought into play, and when

these were loaded, together with the sailboat, they were to take the oysters over to Bunn's Cove and scatter them on the ground Joe had hired.

On Monday they were to start at the business.

There were no races scheduled to take place on Saturday, so Joe worked hard the entire day.

That night he received a daintily-perfumed envelope at the post office.

Tearing it open, he found the following inside:

"Miss Agnes Armour requests the pleasure of your company at her residence, Blueville, New Jersey, on June 29th, in honor of her seventeenth birthday."

Joe was filled with pleasure.

It was Don Everett's step-sister who had invited him to her birthday party, but he meant to go, just the same.

CHAPTER XX.

PLANTING OYSTERS.

Just because Don Everett is down on me is no reason why I shouldn't attend the birthday party of his step-sister," Joe Masterson reasoned. "In my opinion she is, by far, the prettiest girl in Blueville."

But the party was several days off, and Joe had considerable work to do before that time.

Old man Edwards was anxious to get at the seed oysters, so arrangements were made to rake up the first lot at low water on Monday night.

The four now interested in the scheme were Joe, Jake Leeds, Bill Edwards and his father.

The catch of fish was a pretty large one on Monday, so our friends were forced to work pretty hard.

Consequently when night came they were tired.

But not so tired that they had no desire to board the trim little sailboat at eight o'clock and start out.

As might be supposed, an examination was made to make sure that there were no stowaways on the boat. The former experience of Joe and Jake was enough to cause them to be on their guard.

Bill and his father knew nothing of it, and just at present they did not think it advisable to tell them.

The oysters were so plentiful that before the tide had risen to half its usual height the skiffs were loaded.

"My!" exclaimed old man Edwards, "but this is the greatest thing I ever saw! A few more nights like this and we will have laid the foundation for a fortune."

"What time is it?" queried Jake.

"A quarter to two."

"Two of us can crawl up forward and take a nap, then. We won't dare to do any work in the cove till it is daylight."

"That's so," nodded Joe. "Jake, you and uncle can turn in; Bill and I will sail the boat."

The breeze had freshened a bit by this time and the run to Bunn's Cove was soon made.

Joe knew exactly where the ground he had hired was located. He knew this by the arrangement of the hickory stakes that showed the boundary lines.

Gradually it began to lighten in the east, and presently the red glow of the sun could be seen.

Our hero roused Bill, who had dropped off in a doze.

Then he called to Jake and the old man that it was time to go to work.

A few minutes later they were ready to scatter the seed on the oyster ground.

They had scarcely begun when a sailboat glided up and a man in the bow called out:

"What are you doin' there?"

"Planting oysters," was Joe's reply.

"Who are you?"

"Joe Masterson."

"Oh, you are the young fellow from Blueville who leased that ground for three years, are you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm the watchman. It's my duty to see that everything is done right in the bay. Young fellow, you needn't be afraid of your oysters being disturbed so long as I hold my job."

"Thank you," retorted our hero.

"Where did you get your seed?" queried the watchman, as his boat hove to very near to them.

"It came 'way up from Newark Bay," said Jim Edwards, telling a lie.

"It's pretty high, ain't it?"

"Yes, rather."

"Let's see some of it, will you?"

Not wishing to refuse the man's request, which is a common one among oystermen, Joe tossed half a shovelful of the seed aboard his boat.

"My!" exclaimed the watchman, as he took some of the young bivalves in his hand, "that's the prettiest stuff I've seen in many a year! But you didn't get it from Newark Bay, though; the fellow you bought it of might have told you so, but no such seed as that grows there, young feller, if I know anything about it. You'll have your oysters ready to sell by two years from this fall. How many bushels are you goin' to put down?"

"From six hundred to a thousand."

"My! I wish I knew where you got that seed."

No one made a reply, so the watchman gave an order to the boy who sat steering and the boat went on.

As he went on up the bay the man muttered:

"I'd give a good deal to know where that seed came from! It's the best I ever saw! I'd like to have about a hundred bushels of it to plant for myself, and if it didn't cost more than seventy cents a bushel, I've just got money enough. Funny they didn't want to say much about it."

Our friends soon scattered their catch of the night before over the grounds and lined it off by the stakes where they were to begin the next time.

Then they set sail for home, and the wind being favorable, they soon got there.

Of course none of them felt like working that day, but the fishing nets had to be lifted, and after they had indulged in a cup of coffee apiece and some good wholesome food they went at it.

By noon they were through, and then all four were glad to take to their couches and get the rest they were so sorely in need of.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WATCHMAN GETS VALUABLE INFORMATION.

When Don Everett and Nagle got back to the headquarters of the counterfeiters they did not remain long.

They felt as though they had not been used exactly right by the boss of the gang; even Nagle felt a trifle sore over his father's action in the matter of their prisoner.

As they made their way homeward Don said:

"It will be policy for us to let this thing drop for a while. But just wait! Joe Masterson will surely be fixed—don't forget that!"

"I am just as anxious to have him fixed as you are," retorted Nagle. "I have been doing my part right along."

"I know that. Well, we will let the thing drop for a few days. It seems rather odd that we never hear anything of what happens. Why is it that Masterson don't report to the village officials and try and learn who it is that has tried to kill him?"

"I am sure I don't know. Thinks he's smart enough to take care of himself, I suppose."

"Well, by him doing as he is, it will be all the better for us."

"Yes."

When Nagle's home was reached the villainous young pair parted, Nagle going in the house and Don proceeding on homeward.

But they parted with the understanding that they were to meet and talk things over in a few days.

A whole week passed.

On Monday night Don's father called him into the library and asked him how matters were progressing.

The boy told him just how things stood.

"Bad—bad!" exclaimed the man, half to himself. "Oh, if he should only find out—if he should only find out!"

"Find out who he is, father?" questioned young Everett. "You tell me who Joe Masterson is, father—will you?"

"Not now—not until he is dead. Then I will tell you all," was the hurried reply.

Don said no more. He knew it would be useless to ply any further questions.

"By the way, Don," said his father, as the boy arose to leave the room, "did you know that Agnes had invited this boy Masterson to her birthday party?"

"Agnes is a fool!"

"Hush, my boy. She must be pleased. Joe Masterson must come to the party!"

"I'll lose all control of myself and kill him if he does."

"No, no! You must make friends with him—ay! apologize to him for the way you have treated him on several occasions."

The next day Don mounted his bicycle and went out for a ride.

Somehow he took the road that crossed the creek, and when he rode over the bridge he looked at the mouth of the creek and cursed under his breath.

"I'd just like to know how they ever escaped from drowning," he muttered.

Though rather narrow, the road was a good one, and Everett kept on until he reached the little settlement at Bunn's Cove.

Though scarcely a man yet, he had a bad man's habits; so Don went into the only place where liquor was sold.

A number of men who followed the oyster business for a living were congregated in the barroom, and without noticing them Don walked to the bar and ordered a drink.

The conversation was solely on the topic of oysters.

Presently the bicycle rider pricked up his ears. He heard seed oysters mentioned in connection with the sailboat *Emma* from Blueville.

One of the men happened to be the oyster watchman, and he was telling of the extra quality of the seed our four friends had planted that morning.

Don pricked up his ears.

He knew something about the young oysters himself, and he was anxious to hear what was being said about them.

"I'd give a ten-dollar bill to know where to get some seed just like 'em," he heard the man say.

Everett hesitated a moment, and then, walking over to the speaker, said:

"I should like to speak with you privately for a moment."

"All right," was the reply. "I don't know you, but I'm willing to be acquainted with you."

Don walked out of the saloon and the man followed.

When they were out of the hearing of the rest Don cleared his throat.

"You said you were anxious to know where the seed oysters came from that you saw on the sailboat *Emma* this morning?"

"I did say that—and I mean it, too."

"Well, I happen to know where they came from."

"You do?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, prove it to me that more can be got like what I saw and the ten dollars are yours."

"I don't want your money, my friend. You just promise to do something for me some time and I'll tell you."

"Go ahead; I'll promise."

"The seed oysters lie at the bottom of the bay near the mouth of Crook Creek."

"They do?"

"Yes. I saw two fellows from Blueville catching them there."

"When?"

"One night about a week ago."

"You did, hey? By Jove! I wonder if they don't know it is against the law to work on oyster grounds in the darkness of the night!"

"They know it, of course, but they are both the sort of young fellows who care nothing about the law. Now, in return for the information I have given you, I want you to watch the *Emma*, and the next time she anchors at the mouth of Crook Creek arrest those on board of her when they go to work at the oysters."

"I'll attend to it, sure."

"And you mustn't, under any consideration, bring my name in it," continued Everett.

"No. What is your name, anyhow?"

Don handed him his card.

After reading it, the watchman placed it in his pocket.

"I'll do exactly as you say, young feller," he said, "and I'm much obliged to you for the information."

"Oh, that is all right. About how long will they be sent up, if convicted?"

"Not less than three years."

"I wish the penalty was hanging!" exclaimed Everett, vindictively.

The watchman looked at him curiously, but said nothing.

"You go on and do the thing up properly, and you'll always find me to be a friend to you," added Don. "You had better go pretty well armed, for Joe Masterson and his crowd are desperate characters."

"If they don't surrender they'll get shot dead. I'm a deputy sheriff, you know."

"Good! Well, I'll go on now. The chances are they will be there to-night. So long!"

"So long, young fellow."

Don Everett rode away, thinking he had done a very smart thing, but if he had known the thoughts of the watchman he would have changed his mind.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE POISONED WINE.

Joe and his companions did not go out in the *Emma* that night. They concluded to make trips to the creek about three nights in

the week, as they could not stand it to be up all night any oftener than that.

But the next night they went down and repeated their performance of Monday night, no one interfering with them.

They saw the watchman, too, when they were throwing the seed out. He even came aboard, in fact, and made himself very friendly.

Old man Edwards had his doubts about it being against the law to take up seed from natural beds in the night, so in a casual, off-handed way he asked the watchman about it.

"A feller can work all day and all night, too, if he wants to, so long as he ain't on any grounds that are staked out," he said. "The law only pertains to grounds owned by resident individuals of the State."

Then, turning to our hero, he added:

"I know you don't get this seed from Newark Bay. You catch it yourselves somewhere around here, don't you?"

"Yes," returned Joe, "and not many miles from here, either."

"Will you sell me a hundred baskets at seventy cents a basket?"

"After we get our piece of ground planted I'll tell you just where you can catch it, and all it will cost you is the labor."

"I know just where you catch it. I've kinder taken a notion to you people, and I want to give you a chance to make something off your discovery."

"You know where we catch the seed!" exclaimed our four friends in a breath.

"Yes; up at the mouth of Crook Creek."

A look of consternation came over the faces of Joe and his companions.

"You are right," the champion bicycle rider at length said. "Well, you have as much right to the seed as we have. It is public property, you know."

"I know that," was the retort. "But I can't hold the job of watchman of these grounds and attend to catching the oysters at the same time."

"Who told you where we got the seed?" Jake Leeds ventured to ask.

"A young fellow from Blueville, who I set down to be a rascal before I had talked five minutes with him."

"Do you know his name?"

"Yes. Don Everett."

"Whew!" cried Joe and Jake simultaneously.

"I wonder how he knew it?" added Bill.

"He didn't tell me how he knew it," answered the watchman. "But, as I said before, I put him down as a scoundrel, and yesterday afternoon I took a run over to Blueville to see if I could find out what kind of a feller he was."

"I found that he bore a pretty good character, as far as the village people knew, but on my way back I saw and heard something that convinced me that I was right when I thought he was a scoundrel."

"What did you learn?" questioned Joe, who was very much interested.

"When you go to a certain birthday party a few nights from now, don't you drink anything away from the table—no matter who offers it to you! Will you do as I say?"

"Yes," answered the mystified boy.

"Well, don't ask me anything further now. I'll see you alone some time and tell you all about it. I came aboard your boat on purpose to tell you this."

"Thank you," was all Joe could say.

"And," resumed the man, "let me advise you to let your nets take care of themselves for a week or two, and you get at the

seed every day that is fit to work. There is money in that bed of natural growths you have struck."

"We will take that advice, too," said our hero, after a moment's thought.

"Yes—yes," exclaimed old man Edwards, nodding his head vigorously.

"I'll meet you at Crook Creek to-morrow morning, then. I want to sound the bed, and I don't want to go there if you ain't there."

"We'll be there."

"So long, then. Don't forget what I have told you."

"I won't."

"I am a friend to you, just as sure as I am Dave Jones, the deputy sheriff."

"Thank you, Mr. Jones."

On the way home our hero had little to say. He was too much engrossed in thinking of what Dave Jones had told him.

That the watchman was sincere in what he had said he had not the least doubt.

Once he came to the conclusion that he would not attend the birthday party; but when the pretty face of Agnes Armour came before him he changed his mind and resolved to go at all hazards.

After they had moored the boat in her proper place Jake Leeds whispered to Joe and said:

"I'm pretty sure that Don Everett had something to do with the attempt on our lives at Crook Creek now."

"So am I."

"Hadn't we better have him arrested on suspicion?"

"No; not just yet."

"Don't you think Everett had something to do with Bill's adventure at the haunted house, too?"

"I can't say about that."

"Well, I do."

The two friends parted and went to their respective homes.

The next day a storm set in early in the morning, so the young oyster planters could not resume their work.

The storm continued until the night the birthday party was to take place, and just cleared in time for those invited to get ready to attend.

Joe had been unable to see Dave Jones to learn anything further from him; but he got ready to go to the party.

Why the deputy sheriff had spoken the way he did was simply this:

On his return trip from Blueville he saw a broken buggy at the roadside.

Two men were endeavoring to right it up, one an elderly one and the other a mere boy.

The latter was Don Everett, and the watchman recognized him at a glance.

The other was his father, and as Jones neared them he heard the name of Joe Masterson mentioned.

He crept into the bushes nearby and heard a dastardly plot upon our hero's life concocted.

He also heard something else, which related to the counterfeiters.

The villainous father and son were not wise in talking as they did, but they had no idea of any one being around.

The plot against Joe's life was that pretty Agnes Armour was to hand him a glass of wine and ask him to drink to her health.

The wine was to contain a deadly poison, and no one was to be in the secret save Don Everett and his father.

Dave Jones was a shrewd man. He saw a way to make money and a name for himself by investigating the matter relating to

the counterfeiters, who, he had heard, were operating in the vicinity.

But to the birthday party.

Joe went and was warmly received by the beautiful young hostess.

Nagle was present, and he came up and offered his hand, saying:

"Joe, I am sorry I ever did anything against you. Shake hands and let's be friends."

Joe took his hand, as there was nothing else for him to do just then.

But he did not believe the boy was sincere, just the same.

A few minutes later Don came up and asked his forgiveness.

Much surprised, our hero treated him the same as he had done Nagle.

While the three boys were talking pretty Agnes Armour came up with a glass of wine in her hand.

"Mr. Masterson," said she, smiling sweetly, "I am seventeen years old to-day. Won't you please drink to my health, as the rest have done?"

Forgetful of what the oyster watchman had told him, Joe took the glass.

"Certainly!" he said. "Here's health and happiness to you, Miss Armour!"

He raised the glass to his lips!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEATH OF MRS. EVERETT.

As Joe Masterson raised the glass of wine to his lips his eyes happened to turn upon those of Don Everett.

As he gazed into their depths he saw that they were filled with a devilish gleam.

Then Joe hesitated, and like a flash the deputy sheriff's warning came to him.

"I—I don't think I will drink this wine, Miss Armour," he stammered, handing the glass back to the fair young girl.

Don saw his sister take the glass with an air that showed she was puzzled over Joe's refusal to drink from it, and then, with a muttered curse on his lips, he stalked away in search of his father to tell him how the last plot had failed.

Our hero's face was very pale when he saw the girl place the glass of wine on a tray on the table.

It seemed hardly possible that the wine could be poisoned, but the watchman of the oyster beds had told him not to accept a drink from any one at the birthday party.

And Joe was going to follow his instruction, now that he remembered it.

Like one in a dream Joe stood there, his back against the door frame. He saw Agnes place the glass on the tray, and the moment she had done so her mother stepped over to it.

"Pooh!" exclaimed the woman; "what nonsense! Afraid to drink a glass of fine, mild port."

Before Joe knew what she had done Agnes' mother had placed the glass to her lips and drained its contents.

"I—I am sick," he faltered. "I think I shall go home. I hope you will excuse me, Miss Armour."

"Certainly," was the reply, in a tone of sympathy. "I am so sorry you are ill, Mr. Masterson. You shall ride home in our carriage."

"No! no! Walking will be better for me. I'll—"

At this juncture Mrs. Everett gave a hysterical shriek and fell to the floor.

In a moment the guests were filled with consternation, and a physician was hastily summoned.

She was dead before he arrived, and after a slight examination he declared her to be a victim of heart disease.

There were two people present who were absolutely stunned at the untimely death of Mrs. Everett. One was her husband and the other Joe.

The former knew that the wine was poisoned, and the latter felt that such was the case.

The guests took their departure from the house in a hushed manner.

Joe did not feel anything like his old self till he got home.

"What's the matter, Joe?" queried Mrs. Edwards. "You did not stay long at the party."

"No," replied the boy. "The party was brought to a sudden end by the death of Mrs. Everett."

"What!"

"Mrs. Everett dead!" echoed Jim Edwards. "Why, I shouldn't think they would have had a party when she was sick."

"She was not sick at all. She died in an instant. Heart disease, the doctor said."

After a few minutes' further conversation on the subject the boy sought his room.

But it was little sleep he got that night. His mind was in such a state of worryment that he could not sleep.

The next day being a fine one, the *Emma* sailed down to Crook Creek, and our four friends started in at taking up the young oysters in earnest.

Shortly after they began work Dave Jones, the deputy sheriff, came along with his boat.

The news of the sudden demise of Mrs. Everett had reached Bunn's Cove before he left, and it was the first thing he spoke of when he saw Joe.

"Tell me how it happened?" he said, as he boarded the *Emma* and led the way to the bow.

"I refused a glass of wine and she drank it and died," said our hero, in a whisper.

"Ah! Well, we have evidence enough to hang both Everett and his son. Do you know one thing? I have given up my job as watchman, and I am now going to devote my time between this bed of natural growths and the Everetts and their associates. I know something that will startle the whole State when it comes out. I find that I was cut out for a detective, and I am going to follow that profession now."

The deputy drew himself up proudly as he spoke the words.

"Don't say anything about what you know," he added. "As soon as the funeral is over I want to make arrangements with you to go out with me some night. Will you do it?"

"Certainly I will," retorted Joe, who had taken a strong liking for the man.

"All right then. Now for the oysters."

All hands worked hard that day and threw the oysters out in the cove.

It was the same way the next, but as the funeral of Mrs. Everett took place on the day following, they did not go to work.

According to the custom of country folks, almost every one attended the solemn services, which took place in the little, old-fashioned church of the village.

On the same day of the funeral the grief-stricken Agnes Armour went to live with her aunt in New York.

Don Everett and his father gave up the handsome cottage, sold the furniture it contained and went to board with the Nagles.

For some reason or other Joe and Dave Jones did not go out

together for several days. The oyster business was so enticing that they stuck right to it.

On the third day of July they had pretty well cleaned the natural beds of the luscious young bivalves.

Dave Jones had been taken in as a partner, and his grounds had been thoroughly planted.

Joe had done little or no bicycle riding in the past two weeks, but he was entered in the races to take place on the Fourth of July.

A more patriotic village than Blueville would have been hard to find. The powder that was burned and the bunting displayed cost a large sum.

But the main feature of the day was the bicycle races in the afternoon, which were open to all comers.

Our hero had not been bothered by his unknown enemies since the death of Mrs. Everett, and, owing to the muscular work he had been doing for the past few weeks, he was in excellent form, as far as endurance was concerned.

All he lacked was practice on his wheel.

Much to his surprise he learned that Don Everett had entered in the principal event, which was a five-mile road race.

There were eight entries all told, one of them being an entire stranger to any one in Blueville.

This fellow went under the name of L'Homme, and it was rumored that he was worth keeping an eye on.

Just before the first race started Dave Jones, the deputy sheriff, came to Joe.

"Look out for that fellow L'Homme," he whispered. "He was brought here by your enemies on purpose to defeat you. He is a professional sailing under a false name."

CHAPTER XXIV.

MORE FOUL SCHEMING.

Bill Edwards, who was now a full-fledged member of the bicycle club, had, at his own request, obtained the position of "stake-boy" for the races.

His duties were simply to stand in the road at a given distance and see that all the contestants went around him when they turned to make the last-half of the race.

Bill wanted this position so he could look out for the safety of Joe Masterson. He had not forgotten what happened at the last race, and with his revolver in his pocket he was ready for the mysterious negro, or any one else who made a move to do his friend harm.

There were but three races to be run that afternoon—a one, two, and a five-mile race. Joe was entered in all of them, and Bill wanted to see him win them all.

But there were others besides Bill who were looking out for the interests and welfare of the young champion.

Jake Leeds and Tom Simmons had taken it upon themselves to station themselves at two different lonely places on the course, and each of them carried a pistol in his pocket.

The first race Joe won easily, without a mishap occurring to any of the riders.

He received the applause and congratulations that he well deserved, and then got rubbed down to be ready for the second event.

The champion of the Juniper Wheelmen was to take part in this event. He had improved a great deal, so his friends claimed, and some of them offered their money even on him.

Of course, they found takers—more than they could accommodate, it proved.

When the race was about to be started it was estimated that over three hundred dollars would change hands when it was over.

A two-mile race was just what Joe liked. He had beaten the Juniper champion twice before, and he resolved to do it again.

There were but three other contestants in the race, and when the first mile had been covered they were so far behind as to be virtually out of it.

The Juniper favorite led the way around the "stake-boy" by half a dozen lengths.

"Go it, Joe!" sang out Bill Edwards. "I'll stake my life that you will win!"

"I'll try hard to do it," answered our hero, as he bent to his work.

Like a shot he glided ahead and won by three lengths.

For the third time Juniper had suffered defeat at the hands of the champion of the Bicycle Boys of Blueville.

A couple of stalwart fishermen picked up the victorious racer and carried him to his dressing room on their shoulders.

While the cheering was going on the enthusiastic citizens who had charge of the village cannon began firing it.

Don Everett and Nagle darted among these, and the latter assisted in the loading of the piece.

In order to make a loud report they had been pounding grass and leaves into the cannon till they almost stuck out at the muzzle.

Though no scheme had been devised to do harm to Joe at this stage of the game, Nagle saw a way to put an end to his existence.

The dressing room Joe had been carried to was on the top floor of the building occupied by Caldwell, the grocer.

The cannon was in the little square in front of the window of the little room.

Nagle knew all this, and when the powder had been put in the cannon for another salute he contrived to thrust two stones of the size of a goose egg into the cannon along with a handful of grass and leaves.

He put the rammer in and pounded them down well.

Then some more grass was put in, and the man in charge got ready to fire.

Just as he got ready to apply the match, the villain Nagle swung the muzzle of the cannon around so it pointed directly at the window of the dressing room.

Thinking he had done this so the grass would not hit any of the crowd, the gunner applied the match.

Boom! The report was the loudest the piece had given out that day, and true to Nagle's calculations the stones whirled through the window of the dressing room.

Joe was reclining on a sofa at the time, and Frank Caldwell was rubbing his legs vigorously.

When the cannon went off it seemed as though the building was collapsing. A mass of plaster fell upon them and the room was filled with dust.

But they were not hurt.

Once more Joe Masterson had escaped death by a miracle.

No one outside knew what had happened until the two boys came rushing downstairs.

The man in charge of the cannon admitted to having put some clay in the piece along with the grass, and to this the cause of the damage done to the building was attributed.

Grocer Caldwell was very indignant, and he was joined by several citizens in denouncing the gunner for his carelessness.

The result was that the cannon was moved to a large vacant lot, and Nagle received no blame whatever.

He was thankful for getting off so easy, but he was mad because his scheme had not worked.

"Never mind," he said, after he had told Don Everett what he had done, "the bridge will fix him, anyhow. That can't fail, even if he has got as many lives as a cat."

Don's eyes twinkled dangerously.

"You are right," he said.

Joe soon recovered from the shock his narrow escape had given him and got ready for the last and greatest race of the day.

The five-mile course was the same as that used before, and passed the haunted house.

Right near the weed-covered property was a wooden bridge, which spanned a brook that flowed through a narrow strip of woods and emptied into the bay.

The bridge was not in the best of condition, but it was considered perfectly safe by those who used it.

Don and Nagle had arranged with one of the members of the gang of counterfeiters to have the two middle planks of the bridge to give way just as Joe Masterson approached it on his wheel.

Of course, those close behind would have to suffer also, but what cared they so long as they brought defeat, and perhaps death, to the boy they hated.

The lives of others were no consideration whatever to them.

Being an ingenious sort of a villain, the counterfeiter had arranged it so that a kick with his foot against a flimsy support would cause the two planks to drop. Then he would sneak off into a dense growth of elders and make his way to the haunted house.

It was understood that Don was to make a spurt and cross the bridge ahead of Joe and the moment he was safely across the planks were to drop.

The counterfeiter guaranteed that he would make no mistake, and he did not.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BRIDGE.

When the pistol cracked for the start of the road race Everett set the pace and Joe dropped in second.

Don kept along at about a three-thirty gait until the bridge came in sight.

Then he shot out as though he was making a final spurt, and crossed it fully a dozen yards ahead of Joe.

Our hero was surprised at this move, but, nevertheless, he put on more steam.

L'Homme was fully a hundred yards in the rear at the time, and did not increase his speed a particle.

When Joe was within ten feet of the bridge the two middle planks dropped with a crash.

A thrill of horror shot through the boy. It was an utter impossibility to stop, and to turn to either the right or left would hurl him into the brook with its jagged rocks and stones.

He must go on straight ahead.

The missing planks left an opening of two feet in width, and that was enough to cause the complete smash-up of any bicycle ever made.

But Joe did not hesitate. If possible he pressed harder on the pedals.

Almost the instant he saw his danger he saw there was one chance to get over the bridge.

The narrow beams that had supported the planks were visible. He would cross on one of them!

Whizz! whirr! Bump! bump! He was over.

Then, just as though nothing had happened, he darted away after Don Everett.

L'Homme dismounted at the bridge and crossed it on foot.

Joe passed Don and reached the "stake-boy" first.

"Follow me up close, Bill!" he panted. "My enemies are at their tricks again."

Bill waited till Don and L'Homme had turned, and then, mounting his wheel, darted after them.

Everett only rode a few yards, and then he slowed down and dismounted.

But the stranger kept on. He had been brought to Blueville to defeat the young champion, in case the bridge scheme failed, and as it had, he let himself out to do it.

As Don neared the bridge he saw that the planks were back in their place and that Jake Leeds and the deputy sheriff were standing on either end of it, each holding a revolver.

"The bridge is all right now, Joe!" shouted the deputy. "Go right ahead and win the race. I'll shoot down the man who interferes."

L'Homme heard this remark, and the way he pressed down upon his pedals signified that he thought his life was in danger.

He overtook Joe, but could not pass him.

When Bill Edwards came up Jake Leeds mounted his wheel and the two started in the wake of the racers.

Dave Jones watched them till they were out of sight, and then with something like a grin on his face he walked down the bank and under the bridge, up to his knees in the water of the brook.

Bound hand and foot, and lying upon a flat rock, was the villain who had caused the planks to drop.

"Ha!" exclaimed the deputy, "so you thought it was wise to do as I said, and you kept your mouth shut. Now, then, I'll take charge of you. I'll soon see that you're lodged in the county jail."

"What right had you to come down here and knock me down and tie me up?" growled the helpless man.

"You played an awful murderous trick, and any one had a right to do as I did. If I had seen you just as you knocked them planks loose I'd have shot you stone dead."

"You'd better let me go," went on the villain, in a milder tone. "I've got nearly fifty dollars in my pocket and I'll give it all to you if you do."

"Not by a jugful!" retorted the deputy. "I'm going to untie your feet, and then I want you to come right on peaceably."

"Who are you, anyhow?" demanded the prisoner, as Jones untied his feet.

"I'm a deputy sheriff—that's who I am," was the rather proud reply.

"Oh!"

"You needn't say 'Oh!' I'm onto you and some other people not far away from here. Come on, now!"

Out through the brook he half dragged the man and started up the bank.

But just then something happened that Dave Jones had not bargained for.

Don Everett sprang upon him with a club, and with one blow felled him senseless to the ground.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MYSTERIES BEGIN TO UNRAVEL.

L'Homme was a crack professional rider, though he entirely lacked principle. He knew he must beat the young Blueville champion or else fall out forever with Don Everett, who had paid him to enter the race.

Both riders nerved themselves for the final spurt.

A few minutes later the time came, and like meteors the two bicycles forged ahead.

A thrill shot through our hero. He saw that his rival's attempt had proven too much for him and that he was beginning to wobble in a dangerous manner.

With a mighty effort Joe dashed ahead, and two seconds later he swept over the tape—once again a winner!

L'Homme almost fell from his wheel. He had overdone the matter and the reaction was too great for him.

Nagle was there to take care of him, and when he led the defeated racer away that was the last the people of Blueville ever saw of L'Homme.

Some of the people waited a while for Don Everett to come in, for they expected he would be very much crestfallen.

But he did not show up again that afternoon.

The postmaster called Joe as he mounted his wheel to go home and handed him a letter.

The envelope was in mourning and had been mailed in New York.

As our hero had seen the handwriting of Agnes Armour before, he at once recognized it as hers.

He tore open the envelope and read as follows:

"DEAR MR. MASTERSON: Meet me at the residence of my aunt, No. — Lexington Avenue, New York City, to-morrow—Sunday—at 2 P. M. I have something of the utmost importance to tell you. Do not fail. AGNES ARMOUR."

Joe got home a few minutes after six and found Bill already there.

"So you won again, Joe?" said old man Edwards, with a pleasant smile. "I was just tellin' the old gal that I'd like to make you a present of something, I feel so proud of you. She told me what would be good to give you, and I've got it here now."

Much to Joe's surprise, he opened an old tin box and pulled out a gold locket and chain and some baby's clothing.

"This for me!" the boy gasped.

"Yes. They belonged to you when you first come here, and so they do yet. I hope you'll excuse me for not givin' 'em to you before. You know, you was washed ashore from a wreck when you was a baby, Joe."

"I have heard some such thing intimated by the neighbors," replied the puzzled Joe as he took the tiny garments and the locket; "but you always tried to make me believe that you were my uncle, and it now seems that I am no relation to you."

"Not a bit, by blood," exclaimed Mrs. Edwards. "But, Joe, we've learned to like you an awful lot lately. I hope you won't leave us entirely when you find out about your relatives."

"I shall never forget you," the boy answered in a dazed way as he made his way upstairs to his room.

Once here, he proceeded to examine the articles given him.

The clothing was of the finest material, which showed that the child who had worn it was undoubtedly of very well-to-do parents.

But the locket and chain! Joe knew they were solid gold.

On the outside of the locket were engraved the words:

"To little Joe, from his Aunt Emily on his first birthday, June 18, 1883."

"So my name is really Joe, then," mused the champion bicycle rider as he seated himself in a chair like one in a dream.

The next thing for him to do was to open the locket, and this he quickly did.

It contained the picture of a sweet-faced girl of twenty, and as Joe gazed upon it the tears began coursing down his cheeks.

His features were almost exactly like those in the miniature, and he knew it was his mother.

For a long time he sat in the chair thinking over the past and wondering what was in the future for him.

"I'd give everything in the world if I could only find the original of that picture living!" he exclaimed. "Oh, how nice it must be to have a mother!"

A knock at his door disturbed his meditations, so he got up and found Bill there.

"I don't want to bother you, Joe; but perhaps you'd like to know that Jake Leeds has found where I was before you found me on the beach the other night."

"He has!" and Joe sprang to his feet, putting the locket in his pocket.

"Yes; there's a secret door leading into a tunnel, just a few feet from where you found me."

"How did you come to find it?"

"Come downstairs; he's there waiting for you. He'll tell you all about it."

Somehow it struck our hero that there was lots of mystery that was soon to be unraveled, and he felt just in the humor to hear Jake's story.

Once outside the house, the big boy began talking excitedly.

"You know after the last race?" he began.

"Yes," said Joe.

"Well, I followed Nagle when he took the defeated stranger away."

Our hero nodded.

"They didn't go home, but down to the beach."

"Ah!"

"They took their bicycle with them, and I was wondering what they were going to do with them on the beach."

Again Joe nodded.

Jake had a peculiar way of telling a thing, and there was no use trying to hurry him.

"They sneaked along the beach till they came to the little cave there," he resumed, "and then, after gazing all around to see that no one was looking, they went into the cave."

"I was right above them, behind a tree, when they did this, though they didn't see me."

"I got down without making a particle of noise, and what do you suppose happened?"

"I don't know—go on."

"I peeped in and saw a door open in the back of the cave and a man standing in the mouth of a tunnel."

Joe was much interested now, and Bill's eyes were like saucers.

"They went on in the tunnel—Nagle and L'Homme did, taking their bikes with them," said Jake in a tragic tone.

"That being the case, I can readily understand one thing," exclaimed our hero.

"What?" asked his companions in a breath.

"The tunnel leads to the haunted house!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"I CAME TO TELL YOU WHO YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER WERE."

"The tunnel leads to the haunted house!"

As Joe uttered these words Bill Edwards and Jake Leeds looked at each other and nodded.

They realized that such must certainly be the case, though neither had thought of such a thing till the champion bicycle rider mentioned it.

"Let's make sure whether it does or not," Jake proposed.

"Yes," chimed in Bill.

"I am willing," said Joe. "We can take a run down there, and, with the aid of a crowbar, we ought to find out where the door in the back of the cave is."

"We'd better wait till it gets good and dark," advised the big boy.

This was decided to be the proper caper, so about a quarter to nine the trio started out, each carrying a loaded revolver in his pocket.

Jake had a heavy crowbar over his shoulder and Bill took along his bicycle lamp, so they would be able to see what they were doing.

The walk along the beach to the cave was not such an awful long one, and it was about half-past nine when they got there.

After a thorough search had been made about the vicinity, they entered the cave.

Jake at once began sounding with the crowbar.

He had not struck over two or three raps when, to their utter astonishment, the secret door swung open.

But that was not all. A man with a dark lantern in one hand and a pistol in the other appeared in the doorway.

Joe was in just such a state of mind that night that he was ready for any and everything.

As quick as a flash he threw himself upon the man and bore him to the ground.

This action brought Jake and Bill to their senses and they promptly sprang forward to assist him.

Jake got his brawny hand over the man's mouth the first thing, and this stopped all cries he might have uttered.

Bill soon produced a ball of marline, and in a very short space of time the astonished guard of the counterfeiters was securely bound.

Unconsciously Jake had given the signal to open the door, and, thinking it was some of his villainous gang, the guard had done so without asking any further proof.

Poor, deluded mortal!

He had started the way to the downfall of the band of counterfeiters.

"Who are you, anyway, and what are you doing here?" panted Joe as he arose to his feet. "Don't talk too loud. If you do I'll bore a hole through your head!"

"I shan't tell anything—not if you do, kill me," was the grumbling reply.

"Where does this passage lead to?"

"I shan't tell you. You'll find out yourselves."

"Very well, we will find out ourselves. Bill, you take charge of this fellow, and if he opens his mouth above a whisper shoot him!"

"All right," retorted Bill, a little nervously.

"Come on, Jake," said Joe. "You take Bill's lamp and we will go through the passage a little way."

Full of courage, the pair started through the passage they had never dreamed of being there.

They had been through enough during the past few weeks to cause them to look rather lightly upon danger, and, if it came to a

fight in the mysterious tunnel, they were ready to do their share of it.

On they kept, and presently they were within a few feet of the tunnel's end.

Just then they heard a low groan.

Instantly Jake turned the lamp around in the direction it came from.

The rays of the bicycle lamp fell upon the bound form of Dave Jones, the deputy sheriff!

He had been seized by Don and the counterfeiter, bound and dragged into the tunnel to await the return of Everett, who was away at the time.

Joe recognized him at a glance.

"Hello, sheriff!" he whispered. "Don't utter a sound. We are friends."

"Cut me loose, then," came the reply in a low tone. "There is a gang of cutthroats in the cellar the other side of this door. Hurry up!"

Out came our hero's knife and the deputy was at liberty in short order.

"Let's get out of here now," Jake proposed.

"We'd better," nodded Jones, who now knew who his rescuers were.

Not till they were well away from the iron door did the deputy begin to tell what had happened to him.

He had not finished when they reached the cave, and he postponed his story till they had got the prisoner out on the beach.

Then he finished it.

"Now, then, we'll hurry this fellow to the lock-up," he exclaimed as he pulled the captured guard to his feet. "The captain of the gang won't be in, along with some of the rest, till midnight. So I'll get about twenty armed men and we'll grab the whole kit and boodle of them. Come, we've got to hurry up a bit."

Away our friends started for the village lock-up, dragging the captured counterfeiter along with them.

An hour later the villain was safe under lock and key and the deputy was hurrying to get the men together for the raid.

Joe happened to be standing in the railroad depot when the eleven o'clock train came in, and what was his astonishment when he saw Agnes Armour get off.

"Oh, Joe!" she cried, running up to him excitedly. "I was afraid you had not got the letter I sent you, so I came down to-night. I could not help it, Joe. I came to tell you who your father and mother were!"

Had a bombshell exploded Joe Masterson could not have been more astonished.

But there was another who heard the fair girl's words besides himself.

Standing behind the corner of the station was the form of a man whose eyes shone like those of a demon.

It was Don Everett's father.

As our hero led Agnes from the depot the scoundrel muttered:

"You may tell him who his father and mother were, but it will do him no good, for he will be dead before morning, and you along with him!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

EVERETT IS CHECKED.

Joe was thrilled with excitement and admiration as he left the depot with Agnes Armour.

He had been a little smitten on her ever since the day she thanked him for saving her from the enraged bull, but now he was in love with her.

She had journeyed from New York on purpose to tell him that she had learned who and what he was.

"You can tell me in your own way of what you have learned, Miss Armour," said Joe, who was still a trifle bashful.

"Don't call me Miss Armour; call me Agnes," was the rather petulant reply. "I called you Joe when I saw you at the depot, and that should be enough."

She tightened her grasp upon his arm as she spoke, and Joe felt like a hero of ancient days.

"Take me to your home, Joe. Mrs. Edwards will take care of me for the night; I know she will," said Agnes, as they turned the corner of the dark street leading to the beach.

"Yes, certainly——"

That was all Joe could articulate, for at that instant something moist and soft was pressed over his mouth and nostrils, and he was held in a vise-like grip.

A sickening sensation came over him, and then he lost consciousness.

And exactly the same thing took place with his companion.

Without the least unusual sound the pair were rendered helpless and insensible.

And two men had done the work—Mr. Everett and one of his villainous companions.

This couple had been on their way back to the counterfeiters' den when they noticed quite a crowd around the lock-up.

It did not take them long to learn what had happened and what was liable to take place before morning, so they held a consultation to see what course they were to pursue.

They had just about concluded to get out of the State of New Jersey as quickly as possible when they heard the late train coming into the depot.

The members of the desperate gang he belonged to always carried chloroform with them, and the capture of the boy and girl was easily accomplished.

"Where shall we take them?" queried the counterfeiter who was supporting the rather heavy form of our hero.

"To Nagle's. It's only a little ways from here," was the reply.

Owing to the excitement about the lock-up, not a soul had seen them.

Bill Edwards and Jake Leeds were so interested in telling the deputy's men what they knew about the underground passage that they had not noticed the absence of Joe.

When Agnes and Joe were safely in the house Everett gave an exultant cry.

The room they were in was on the first floor of the house, but the shades were down and the shutters tightly closed.

"How are you going to dispose of them—cut their throats?" asked Everett's companion, as he drew an ugly-looking knife from his pocket and tested its sharpness with his thumb nail.

"No, no!" was the reply; "the blood would show that a murder had been committed here. It must not be that way."

"How, then?"

"I want to wait till they come to, then I'll tell you the way. I want to tell them both something before they are sent on their journey to the great unknown," and a gloating smile that would have befitted a fiend passed over Everett's face.

"As you say, but we are losing valuable time."

"Never mind, that. We'll get away all right. I'll take you to a place in New York where we will never be found."

"Whereabouts in New York?"

"To a mansion on Lexington Avenue, which that boy lying there would own if he lived to be twenty-one."

The counterfeiter looked at Everett in surprise, but remained silent.

"Yes," went on the villain who had poisoned his own wife, "this boy has stood in my way for years, and I never knew his whereabouts until I came to Blueville to live this summer. I've been living on what belongs to him, and I mean to till I die, which will be a long time yet, I hope."

"I hope so," and Everett's companion shrugged his shoulders.

"Have you got a strong cord about you?"

"Yes."

"Is it strong enough to strangle a person?"

"Oh, yes."

"Hand it over."

The man did so.

"Are you going to fix these two that way?" he asked.

"Yes, that is just what I am going to do."

"Well, I see the boy is coming to."

"Is he? I'll attend to him then."

As he spoke he drew his revolver and approached the couch.

Just at this moment Joe opened his eyes.

He was dazed and felt a trifle nauseated, and knew not where he was.

"Well!" exclaimed Everett, leveling his revolver at the helpless boy.

This brought our hero partly to his senses.

"Who are you?" he stammered.

"I am your uncle, Fred Everett," was the reply. "I never spoke a truer word in my life than when I say this."

"I—I—don't—don't know," said Joe slowly, as he endeavored to collect his full faculties. "I—yes, I do know you! You are not my uncle! Untie me at once! What am I doing here?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Everett. "You know me, do you? But

you don't believe I am your uncle, do you? But I am, just the same. Your father, my brother Joe, is serving a term in the Ohio State's prison for something I did, and your mother is eking out a miserable existence in New York. Neither of them know you are alive. Your father's time will be up soon, or is up now, I think, but you will never see him. Think of that, Joe Everett, for that is your name—think of that! You will never see your father, or mother either, for I am going to kill you!"

He sprang upon our hero as he ceased speaking and drew the cord about his neck.

Then he began to draw it tight.

But before he had proceeded far the man who had been helping him touched him on the arm.

"See here, Everett," said he, in a tone that thrilled the would-be murderer, "is all that true that you have been saying to that boy?"

"Yes, yes! Every word of it is true," was the reply.

"Then let that boy alone, and leave this house at once with me. By your own confession, you are the worst scoundrel I ever met, and if you don't do as I say one of us will die right here!"

Hardly knowing whether it was real or only a dream, Joe watched the scene with distended eyes.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONCLUSION.

Joe Masterson certainly expected that his last moment had arrived when Everett put the cord about his neck and began to draw upon it.

But no! Everett was a monster and the man with him only an ordinary villain.

The next thing our hero knew the two men were in a desperate struggle.

His fate depended upon who should be the victor.

Back and forth the two men swayed, frightful oaths coming from their lips.

Both had drawn knives and were but waiting for a chance.

Suddenly the door flew open and the woman who had always been known as the Widow Nagle appeared on the scene.

She darted forward and endeavored to separate the men just as Everett made a vicious lunge with his knife.

The woman gave a gasping cry and sank to the floor.

The blade had pierced her heart.

A shudder passed through Joe's frame as he saw all this. Instinctively he turned his eyes to the form of the fair young girl beside him, whose face was so pallid and death-like.

"It is a good thing she is not able to see all this," he thought.

But the tragedy was not over yet, by any means.

When Everett accidentally killed the woman he lost all chances of saving himself.

He succeeded in withdrawing the knife, but too late to do his opponent any harm.

Our hero could not look at the two men.

He was horrified.

He closed his eyes and waited in agony.

Presently he heard a fall.

A moment later a knife severed the cords that bound him.

Then he knew that Everett had been the victim.

Still he did not open his eyes.

It was not till he heard another fall that he ventured to do so.

"Heavens!" he cried, struggling to a sitting posture. "This is awful!"

Both men lay dead on the floor, the counterfeiter, after killing Everett, having died from his wounds.

Nervously he threw the severed cords aside, and then picking up the still unconscious girl he carried her out of the house.

The cool night air caused her to come to, and she uttered a muffled shriek when she found she was being carried.

"It is I—Joe Masterson; don't be alarmed, Agnes," said the boy, as he deposited her on the ground and proceeded to untie the cords about her wrists.

"Where—where am I?" she cried.

"We are all right now. We were drugged and carried to the Nagle house. But we are safe now. It was your step-father who did it, but he can harm us no more, for his accomplice fought him and killed him."

Agnes shuddered.

She was still in a semi-stupefied state, and she clung to Joe for support.

Slowly he led her along the road, and at length they came upon one of the residents of the village. They learned from him that Dave Jones had led a crowd to raid the haunted house, and that Nagle, seeing himself caught, had become insane with fear and had blown the house up with a mixture of chemicals he used in making counterfeits. Every one in the house, including Don and the whole band of counterfeits, was killed except Nagle and L'Homme, who were taken from the *débris* and locked up.

To him Joe briefly told what had happened, and half an hour later Agnes Armour was turned over to the care of Mrs. Edwards and a physician summoned.

The next day people for miles around were shocked when they learned what had taken place in the quiet little town of Blueville.

No one had dreamed of a nest of counterfeits being there, and no wonder people were astonished.

The fate the captain had brought upon himself and those who stuck to him to the last was horrifying, not to say appalling.

Of the entire gang of villains only three were left to be tried.

They were young Nagle, L'Homme and the man who had been on guard at the mouth of the cave near the beach.

Right here we may state that Nagle, having considerable of the spirit of his father, committed suicide before the trial came off.

The other two were convicted and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

And Joe Masterson, the champion bicycle rider!

His enemies were all gone, and he was more than ever the hero of Blueville.

And the best part of it, he now knew who he was, and was

living with his father and mother three days after the raid on the counterfeits.

Agnes Armour had found papers in her mother's trunk which told all about our hero's life.

Just how the papers got there will never be known, but it was evidently through a mistake.

The whole thing, briefly summed up, was as follows:

Joseph Everett inherited a fortune from his uncle, married and his wife gave birth to a son.

Shortly after this his brother, who was no other than Don Everett's father, contrived, by forgery and other villainous efforts, to have the child stolen and, as he supposed, drowned, and have his brother sent to prison for twenty years for a crime he never committed.

The young wife and mother, not knowing how her husband's property had been left, was soon turned out upon the cold world, and finally went to live with a well-to-do family in New York.

And so things had been going for all these years. The husband in prison, the wife living out as a companion and the son living in Blueville.

There was ample proof to show who Joe was, and old Jim Edwards did not hesitate to tell that he had received the child from the villain who had been hired to kill it, and had not found it washed up by the waves, as people had always thought.

From that time Joe Masterson—or Joe Everett, as his real name turned out to be—led a happy life.

Agnes Armour went back to her aunt in the city, more than satisfied with the part she had played in restoring our hero's long lost parents to him.

And when she went back she had given her promise to some day become his wife.

Of course, a long lot of legal proceedings followed, but we will not dwell on that.

Suffice it to say, that Joe's father was set free and got what belonged to him, or what was left of it.

In September, 1897, Joe, Bill, Jake, old man Edwards and the deputy sheriff took up their oysters in Bunn's Cove and sold them for several thousand dollars.

And they kept right on in the business, and are at it yet.

All our friends still live in Blueville, and Joe is still an active member in the club known as the Bicycle Boys of Blueville.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 25, will contain "Submarine Mart; or, The Wonderful Cruise of the Firefly," by the author of "Second Sight Sam."

This is one of the most fascinating stories ever printed. It gives you a true idea of what the life of a deep sea diver is like, and it contains some startling accounts of the secrets of the deep. The *Firefly* is a craft that is bound to interest you, and Submarine Mart's adventures are something to be remembered for a lifetime.

A NEW IDEA !

A NEW WEEKLY !

BRAVE AND BOLD

Street & Smith's New Weekly is a big Departure from anything ever Published Before.

EACH NUMBER CONTAINS A COMPLETE STORY AND THE STORIES ARE OF EVERY KIND.

That means all descriptions of first-class stories. For every story published in BRAVE AND BOLD will be first-class in the best sense—written by a well-known boys' author, full of rattling incident and lively adventure, and brimming with interest from cover to cover. No matter what kind of a boy you are, no matter what your tastes are, no matter what kind of a story you prefer, you will hail BRAVE AND BOLD with delight as soon as you see it. It is the kind of a weekly you have been wishing for. Variety is the spice of life, and Brave and Bold is well seasoned with it.

STORIES OF ADVENTURE. STORIES OF MYSTERY. STORIES OF EXPLORATION IN UNKNOWN LANDS. STORIES OF LIFE IN GREAT CITIES. STORIES OF WONDERFUL INVENTIONS.

No. 1.—One Boy in a Thousand ; or, Yankee to the Backbone. By Fred Thorpe.

No. 2.—Among the Malays ; or, The Mystery of the Haunted Isle. By Cornelius Shea.

No. 3.—The Diamond Tattoo ; or, Dick Hardy's Fight for a Fortune. By M. Boyington.

No. 4.—The Boy Balloonists ; or, Among Weird Polar People. By Frank Sheridan.

No. 5.—The Spotted Six ; or, The Mystery of Calvert Hathaway. By Fred Thorpe.

No. 6.—The Winged Demon ; or, The Gold King of the Yukon. By W. C. Patten.

No. 7.—Stolen—A School-house ; or, Sport and Strife at Still River. By E. A. Young.

No. 8.—The Sea-Wanderer ; or, The Cruise of the Submarine Boat. By Cornelius Shea.

No. 9.—The Dark Secret ; or, Sam Short, the Boy Stowaway. By Launce Poyntz.

No. 10.—The King of the Air ; or, Lost in the Sargasso Sea. By Howard Hoskins.

No. 11.—The Young Silver Hunters ; or, The Lost City of the Andes. By Cornelius Shea.

No. 12.—A Remarkable Voyage ; or, The Fortunes of Wandering Jack. By Captain Geoff Hale.

No. 13.—The Knowlhurst Mystery ; or, The Strange Adventures of Leslie Norton. By Frank Sheridan.

No. 14.—The Diamond Legacy ; or, The Queen of An Unknown Race. By Cornelius Shea.

No. 15.—Bert Breeziway ; or, The Boy Who Joined a Circus. By Bert Tallyho.

No. 16.—Dick Hazel, Explorer ; or, Lost in the African Jungle. By Cornelius Shea.

No. 17.—The Electric Traveler ; or, Underground to the Pole. By the author of Dick Hazel.

No. 18.—The Moonshiners of the Ozarks ; or, The Boy Who Worked for Uncle Sam. By Thomas P. Montfort.

No. 19.—Under Sealed Orders ; or, Lost in the Wilds of Yucatan. By Cornelius Shea.

No. 20.—The Mysterious Box ; or, The Hidden Valley of Pirate Island. By the author of "Among the Malays."

No. 21.—Among the Utes ; or, The Marvelous Adventures of Two Young Hunters. By Major Herbert Clyde.

No. 22.—Lost in the Isle of Wonders ; or, The Mysteries of the Echoing Cave. By Captain Basil Benedict.

No. 23.—The Lost Lode ; or, The Boy Partners of Diamond Bar. By Cornelius Shea.

No. 24.—The Bicycle Boys of Blueville ; or, Joe Masterson's Unknown Enemies. By the author of "Bicycle and Gun."

No. 25.—Submarine Mart ; or, The Wonderful Cruise of the Fire-Fly. By the author of "Second-Sight Sam."

No. 26.—Jockey Sam ; or, Riding for Fortune. By E. A. Young.

Copies of the Brave and Bold Weekly may be purchased for Five Cents from all Newsdealers, or from

STREET & SMITH, 238 William Street, New York.
